

By Grace through Faith

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[0 : 00] I would like us for a little time this evening as we seek the Lord's enabling to turn with you to the words we read in Paul's letter to the Ephesians and chapter 2.

Let us read again at the beginning of the chapter. And you, I'm reading here from the authorised person, so please bear with me. And you hath he quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins, where in time past you walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now works in the children of disobedience, among whom also we all had our conversation in times past, in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.

But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he has loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ.

By grace you are saved. And so on. But God, who is rich in mercy for his great love wherewith he has loved us.

Now, when I sat listening to the Reverend Roddy John Campbell last evening, I thought, oh, oh, he's taking my thunder away.

[1 : 44] However, I don't want to, as it were, try in any shape or form to do a presentation as he did last night, because his was very, very good and unique.

And maybe my approach will be slightly different in many respects. But what I'm concerned about this evening, especially in the Friday for communion, and given the fact that the communion season is always a challenge to the Lord's people, a challenge in many respects, inasmuch as that very often we may have doubts.

We may have doubts about our fitness, and that is a good thing. It's a very good thing, in fact, because we should always be searching out of these lives of ours as to whether or not we are in Christ.

I don't mean that definitively. I mean that by way of example, by way of word, by the way that we live. Do we show ourselves to be in Christ?

And that itself can cause great problems for us and difficulties, that we might approach a communion season with tremendous reservation. We might also approach a communion season believing that we may not come up to the mark in many respects as far as the Lord requires of us.

[3 : 13] We may find ourselves very often comparing and contrasting ourselves with other people. the way that other people live in the world as Christians, and you think to yourself, well, where is my life as a believer?

And of course, as we do know, and we will always be checked for it, for seeking to, as it were, contrast our lives with that of others. It may be good to appreciate the example of the lives of the past, of the men and women of the past.

It may be very good for us to take a look down the valley from whence we have come, as we find in Jeremiah. That is a good observation. Of course it is.

But at the end of the day, these lives that we have in Christ Jesus must always be compatible to Christ himself and his walk and his conversation.

If we deem these lives to, as it were, follow the example of mere man, however much grace there might be in mere man, the thing is, we will become stilted.

[4 : 26] We will not grow. We will live our lives according to the norms of the present time or the norms of other people. For the Apostle Paul, his concern was always that he draws their attention to the fact that it is Christ that is in you, the hope of glory, not man, not the traditions of men, not the traditions of any one denomination.

It is Christ. Christ is our example. And then, of course, we shudder maybe at times and say, well, and we do pray, and I'm sure we always pray, and we pray authentically, you know, that we come short of the glory of God.

And none of us can stand up and say, oh, I'm all right. I do everything that Christ requires of me. Well, we know that not to be true. But then, as I reiterated in our prayer, Jesus knows the hearts of each and every one of us in exactly the same way that he knew the heart of Peter.

And how Peter, however bold he might have been, however even presumptuous he might have been, and let us not use, say, Peter as our yardstick either, for negativity or positivity.

We know where Peter stood, at least as far as we understand from scriptural narrative. But we know also that Jesus knew the heart of Peter better than Peter knew it.

[5 : 59] And just in the same way, Jesus knows your heart and my heart better than we know it. And whatever we might want to cover up by way of what other people might learn about us, one thing is sure, it is Christ that we are dealing with.

Having said that, in writing to the Ephesians, the Apostle Paul is at pains to make sure that whatever utterance he's going to make with regard and with respect to their lives as Christians, one thing he does not take away from for one moment, and he does this in several epistles, and that is the relationship that they have to Christ.

they are saints in Christ Jesus. Now according to some traditions, even of our modern age, you know, you've got to be, do many great miracles or something in order to become a saint in Christ.

But that's not true, is it? Those who have been redeemed by his precious blood, those upon whom the gospel of Jesus Christ has had its invigorating activity, changing us from death to life, from darkness to light.

We are saints in Christ Jesus because of what he has done in and through us. We are a new creation. We don't have to have the power of miraculous activity to be a saint in Christ.

[7 : 35] As Paul says, does he not? Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ, in Christ, according as he has chosen us in him before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and without blame before him in love.

The Apostle Paul marks out the territory of the believer in his or her relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ. My purpose this evening is to try to give encouragement really to those who may be coming under a heavy cloud of trial and temptations and tribulations with regard to faith.

And sometimes it's quite good for us to take a step back and that's what the Apostle Paul I think is doing with these Ephesians. He's calling upon them whatever might be their problems and we know that there were plenty of problems in the church at Ephesus.

There were kinds of problems there that probably you and I would be aghast at. But nevertheless, they are the Christ, Christ's people. They belong to the Lord Jesus. But, the Apostle Paul recognizes that they have difficulties and they need to do a retrace.

Sometimes I think that is a word that you and I forget. And it's one of the most singularly important words in the whole dictionary of the Christian life.

[9 : 15] And that is remember. Just remember. And what Paul is doing here at the very beginning of this chapter too, he's drawing attention to a remembrance thing.

He is speaking to them of a state that maybe they had once forgotten. They had forgotten for a time. But, by the same token, it's not a state that it's good for us to forget altogether.

because I think it's always good for us to remind ourselves from where we have come. Not in order that we might beat ourselves with some stick by some kind of self-inflagellation or something, but rather to give a check to ourselves as to what has actually happened in these lives of ours through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And it's good for us to contemplate these things. And I don't think the Apostle Paul is saying them or bringing them back. It's the last thing that you want anyone to tell you what you were once like.

You know, you go back to a community that you were born and brought up of and you can remember the things that you did when you were a young person there. The things that maybe you wouldn't even want anybody else to know.

[10 : 37] What Paul is saying here as we listen to him, where in time past, the language that he is using here, in time past, you walked according to the course of this world. That's where we once were.

And that is very true. We cannot deny it. Even although we want to bury it and hide it and so on, yet we cannot deny it. Oh, God has taken our sin.

Of course he has. He has dealt with it by laying it upon his only beloved son, casting it into the sea of his forgetfulness. forgiveness. But it doesn't detract for one moment the journey that you and I have taken.

When I think of the Psalmist David, not necessarily talking about the sin that may have resulted in the penning of the Psalm 51, but the thought that was behind it all in his own heart and spirit.

He wasn't blaming his mother, but he recognized that where the sin had come from within himself or within any one of us for that matter.

[11 : 49] Behold, he says, I in iniquity was formed the womb within. It's not something that you and I would like to cherish to go down that route and rethink.

But he has been honest with himself. He knows where sin has come. It has come from Adam and you and I, every one of us, everyone that was ever born into this world.

They are tainted with exactly the same problem. And the language that the Apostle Paul is using here that we walked in time past according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now works in the children of disobedience.

Even someone like Peter knew how much the stigma of the past could come upon him so very quickly and also the Apostle Paul himself and he reiterates and we'll come back to that in a moment or two.

But for Peter, Jesus said, Satan wants you, Peter. And that might have been a reminder to Peter not just of his present problem, of his self-confidence, his feeling that he was not a vulnerable soul at all, that he was in charge and that he was as strong as ever.

[13 : 13] This is not the case for each and every one of us. We forget. Remember what God said to the children of Israel? Look down the valley from whence you have come.

You have been a swift dromedary. That's how God spoke of the children of Israel. And that's in some respects of what the Apostle Paul is suggesting to us here.

Not to be negative, but for it to be a heart-searching moment. And give God the glory that it is no longer that case that we are found in.

But we cannot deny where we once were. Among whom also, as he says in verse 3, we all at our conversation in time past, in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and we're by nature the children of wrath, even as others.

Do you ever get a check? A checking? You are seeing somebody that you know very well, maybe even a family friend, family member, or even a very close friend.

[14 : 24] And you're seeing that their life is becoming debauched even more and more. And you might even want to shake your head at the way that that person is living their life without Christ and without hope.

And then you have a rethought and you think to yourself, there but for the grace of God go I. I was once lost.

But now I'm found. I was blind, but now I see. Among whom also we all at our conversation in time pass in the lust of the flesh.

I'm sure we could all bring up stories that would make our children and our grandchildren to shudder at the very thought. We shudder at the very things maybe that we find displayed on our television screens that we would feel ought not to be there.

Yet we might even find ourselves gazing at them and looking upon them and remembering that we too were one time in that kind of lustful way walking in this world.

[15 : 32] What the Apostle Paul is doing here is not beating these people with some kind of hammer or whatever. what he is seeking to do is to remind them this is what you once were.

Thanks be to God. And as we sung in these words of Psalm 101, I mercy will and judgment sing, Lord, I will sing to thee.

I will with a perfect heart let my behavior be. We had our conversation in this world that was an offense to Christ, an offense to God.

But, and that's the important, the whole important part of this, and it's a great part for you and for me. It's the intervention of God, the intervention of God upon your life and mine and what he has done.

The great miracle of redemption, the miracle of redemption applied. Yes, we look at the great miracle in a theological sense, looking at the Lord Jesus Christ having taken upon himself all our sin and all its guilt.

[16 : 53] Yes, that is true. It's the application of it that causes the soul of the believer to be stirred. He has done all this for me. I who was dead and trespass and sinned sins, I who walked according to the former lusts of my ignorance, I who did all of these things that I would dear long forget.

But it is a truth. But it's a truth that not ought to overwhelm us to the extent that we lose sight of the very grace of God that has redeemed us.

But God, who is rich in mercy, that's a lovely expression, isn't it? When it can be appreciated by the believer as a truism, something that has come upon us of which we have been undeserving, God's mercy, I mercy, will, and judgment sing.

But as David says at the beginning of the psalm, Psalm 51, those precious words of how we appreciated a merciful hand, reaching out toward him, delivering him from the bondage and the corruption of sin.

Now I know fine that people can look back upon their lives and see different things to what other people might see, have seen in their life. But by the same token, we were all in the same boat, in this sense, that all had sinned and came short of the glory of God.

[18 : 38] All of us were held deserving. Maybe there's someone here this evening that hasn't appreciated that and still going on in their way, not contemplating the hellishness of a deserving state.

It's something that's almost impossible even for the unbelieving heart to contemplate. It's a believer who can understand a little bit more, not in perfection, but a little bit more of what we have been saved from.

Of course, we're never going to experience the full extent of divine wrath. But when we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, when by faith we accept Christ as our Saviour and our Redeemer, when we appreciate what Christ has done, when we think of what the Lord has done for us, and in this maybe I'm crossing along the same lines as Ruddy John was, you know, you go into the Garden of Gethsemane there and you see the Lord Jesus Christ, the pained heart and soul and spirit, as he looked into that cup and he saw the very wrath of God, the punishment that was our due, when you and I reflect upon the sin that was deserving only of divine wrath and eternal damnation, and yet he laid it on him, laid on him the iniquity of us all.

God who is rich in mercy, but his great love for which he has loved us. It has to be great love, hasn't it? It has to be great mercy, it has to be great love, great love after all, when you consider the stench of these lives of ours, however much we might have wanted to fabricate them and make them appealing to other people, God saw it in his reality.

His nostrils were choked pardon the expression, by what he experienced of the sinfulness of mankind, and yet he loved us.

[21 : 04] Maybe the picture that we can understand at least to a degree, concerning the stench of the life of the unbeliever, and as that unbeliever has come, and appealing to Christ, and calling upon him, is shown pictorially, is it not, in the great parable of the prodigal son.

The son returning home, the father anticipating his return, the father knowing exactly what life he was going to be, and he embraces him with all the stench of this world surrounding him.

love. But the love of the father was so great, so beautiful, so precious. That's what Paul wants these Ephesians to centre upon.

The love of God as we have it in Christ Jesus. What love? Love that knows no bounds.

Love that would take the most vile sinner, sinner. And as one said, he was that vile sinner. You can speak to any's of one, many's of one, and they would say, no, it was me.

[22 : 25] Another would say, no, it was me. The apostle Paul would say, oh, wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?

How wretched did you ever feel yourself to be? Not that it is to be used of you to beat yourself, but rather to, yes, encourage you to flee to the rock that is higher than we are.

God, who is rich in mercy, but his great love for with he has loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses and sins, and hath quickened us together in with Christ Jesus.

By grace you have been saved. this quickening that the Bible speaks of. It's maybe a difficult word in the English, but it's a word that really speaks very strongly of an activity that in some respects you and I are not involved with.

It is that work of the Spirit that challenges the life that is in unbelief, the life that is walking in the broad road, heading towards destruction, the same kind of road that the apostle or Saul of Tarshish was on, and there he was challenged, and there he was changed, a new creation in a moment.

[23 : 55] His life was quickened. He was made a new creation in Christ Jesus, and all of grace, all of grace.

Undeserved? You know fine, as well as I do, that there was nothing in your life that was attractive to God, except for this one thing, because I think it's important never to forget it.

However debauched we might have become, however far we may have been from the intention of God. One thing is sure, that we were created in his image.

And that is something I don't think we should ever forget, when we are contemplating and considering the grace of God. We often use the expression, don't we, when, and maybe in prayer, when we think of the way that God deals with us.

We lived in the waste-howling wilderness, yes. we lived in Egypt, yes, we did. God saw us in these places. But God had a purpose from all eternity, to choose a people to himself, to redeem a people to himself, whatever they might appear to be in this life.

[25 : 22] And however far down the road of debauchery, well, after all these Ephesians, they knew what like it was to live that kind of life, as he uses in the language when he speaks of, you know, lusts of the flesh and of the mind.

But the grace of God, what does it cover? It covers a tremendous amount. By grace you are saved. Through faith, that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God.

I always think to myself, when I consider the desperate state that I might have been in, and how close I might have been to heading to a lost eternity, God forbid that there is anyone here in that state, still on the broad road.

But listen to what the word of God says. The grace of God is our sufficiency. the unmerited favour of God, to look upon the darkness, darkness of your life and mine, and redeem us, and set us free.

That in the ages to come, he might show the exceeding riches of his grace and the kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. The language is beautiful.

[26 : 50] This God, who is holy, who cannot look upon sin, and yet he has looked upon you and me. Why?

Because he loved us. He loved us, and he's a purpose for each and for everyone that would cast their burden upon him, and especially the burden of guilt and of condemnation.

Wherefore, he says in verse 11, wherefore, remember that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called uncircumcision by that which is called the circumcision in the flesh, made by hands, that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

what a Damocles sword to hang above any one of us here, having no hope.

But from this pulpit, and from every other pulpit in this land, these islands, there is hope. There is hope if only we would believe that the grace of God is much better than our unbelief.

[28 : 18] Of course if we stay in that state of unbelief, there is no hope for us. And yes, we are strangers and pilgrims in this world. Of course we are, and we are without hope and without Christ.

But it's not left there. After all, is it not true what is said? He is not willing. He is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to a knowledge of the truth.

You, who are sitting in the fence, are unsure, who are doubting, listen to what Jesus is saying. He is not willing that anyone should perish, but that all should come to a knowledge of the truth.

Now, for the Apostle Paul, the Ephesians, already have the truth. But they need to be built up. And I suppose that's what the journey of faith is all about for you and me, the side of eternity.

Every day is an opportunity to learn more and more and to experience more of the outpouring of the love of God and Christ Jesus for each and every one of us.

[29 : 36] we have no need to be afraid unless, of course, we let ourselves linger in a state of backsliding.

But remember, he prays for us that our faith fail not. And I suppose, in many respects, that's what the Apostle Paul is doing for every church for whom he was concerned.

now in Christ Jesus, you who sometimes were far off, are made blind by the blood of Christ. I don't need to develop that any further.

We've already heard it from the Reverend Roddy John last night. The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanses us from all sin.

Is that not true? Do you believe yourself? to have experienced something of the blood of Christ that has been shed for you.

[30 : 44] There are people sitting beside you maybe, and you know them to be believers, and that they believe that the blood was shed for them. But I ask you this question, if you have a desire, do you this night believe that it is shed for you?

May God grant unto each and every one of us then, those who are of the household of faith, to be assured, but God who is rich in mercy, remember that.

And for those who are still maybe seeking, longing to have the gift of life, life, let it be the case that you take the word even of this whole passage, for by grace you are saved through faith, not of yourselves, but it is the gift of God.

Shall we pray? O gracious and ever-blessed God, we do thank thee that thy hand reaches out toward us.

Lord, a God of mercy and of grace, thy favour, O Lord, that has been shown to us, we can hardly even comprehend that we who were dead in trespasses and sins have been brought an eye by the blood of Christ.

[32 : 17] And we pray that we would never underestimate the significance of the blood that was shed for the remission of sin. May its application upon each and every one of us day by day, through the influence of thy spirit, be a means of strengthening us.

And as we look forward to a communion Sabbath morning, as we take those things that Christ has set before us, to remind us of his death till he comes, may we do so, giving glory to him and honour to him.

Forgive all offence, we pray thee then, and if in anything we have offended thee in what we have said, O Lord, remove it from our minds, and all we ask is in the Redeemer's name.

Amen. We're going to conclude by singing in Psalm 34, Psalm 34, and we're going to sing verses 17 to 19, page 248, page 248, verses 17 to 19, three stanzas, the righteous cry unto the Lord, he unto them gives ear, and they out of their troubles all by him delivered are.

The Lord is ever nigh to them that be of broken spirit, to them he safety doth afford that are in heart contrite. The troubles that afflict the just in number many be, but yet at length out of them all, the Lord doth set them free.

[33 : 55] These three stanzas, the righteous cry unto the Lord. The righteous cry unto the Lord, he unto them gives him and they out of their troubled soul by him delivered are.

The Lord is ever nigh to them that be your broken spirit, to them he saved him about technology, they could know what fostering might he than him and he was in him he saved to child their path his journey.

be. But yet at length at all, the Lord does set him free.

And now may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, the Father, the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, and the Son that gives righteousness. Go before us, bless us above our deserving, and accept of us in him. Amen.