

The Glory of God in Sovereign Grace

Ephesians 2:1-7

Introduction

Last year I was reading a book on adoption by Russell Moore (a seminary lecturer at a Baptist college in the US). In his book Russell describes the adoption of his two boys from an orphanage in Russia. He recalls the very first time he saw these two boys, which a Russian judge had picked out for them: two boys that had been abandoned and dumped by their mothers; orphans.

When Maria and I first walked into the orphanage, where we were led to the boys the Russian courts had picked for us to adopt, we almost vomited in reaction to the stench and squalor of the place. The boys were in cribs, in the dark, lying in their own waste ... Each day we would visit them ... and leaving them at the end of each day was painful, but leaving them on the final day, before going home to wait for the paperwork to go through, was the hardest thing either of us had ever done. Walking out of the room to prepare for the plane ride home, Maria and I could hear Maxim calling out for us and falling down in his crib, convulsing in tears. Maria shook with tears of her own. I turned around to walk back into their room, just for a minute. I placed my hand on both of their hearts and said, knowing they wouldn't understand a word of English, "*I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.*" I don't think I consciously intended to cite Jesus' words to his disciples in John 14:18; it just seemed like the only thing worth saying at the time. For us, it didn't matter that they seemed like any other orphan in that institution; they were part of our family now. We knew them. We loved them. We claimed them. And it didn't matter that for the next several weeks they'd still be called Maxim and Sergei. The nameplates hanging on the wall of their new room in a faraway country read Benjamin and Timothy, **now our sons.** (p.25, Adopted For Life).

I want to say to you this evening as we come to these few verses in Ephesians 2: this is what you and I are being told here; as Paul speaks of the sovereign grace of God in our lives, and as Paul speaks of the Father's love for you: **you were a spiritual orphan dead in your transgressions and sins, and God loved you and made you alive, and raised you up with Jesus to be His son or daughter**

And so what I want to do this evening is to begin by visiting a spiritual orphanage. I want to walk with you down into a spiritual valley and unpack for you the Bible's teaching on the problem of the orphaned soul. Discover the reason why we need Jesus, the reason why the gospel is good news, and the reason why God's grace is glorious.

The gospel is supremely good news when you begin to understand the depths and darkness of the orphanage or valley that you are in. So here in vv.1-3 Paul is going to take you down into the valley of your soul, showing you the depths of your lostness, your helplessness, and your brokenness. And then he's going to show you why the good news is glorious because in vv.4-7 he will ascend the mountain of God's glorious grace and show you the heights of God's grace. We begin with darkness and we end with light; we begin with night before we meet the rising sun; we move from death to life; we begin in a valley before we ascend to the peak of a mountain.

Descending Into the Valley of the Soul: Dead, Enslaved and Under Wrath - vv.1-3 cf.

Eph. 4:18; 2 Cor. 4:4; Phil. 3:18-19; Ezek. 36:26

- You Were Dead

Paul begins in v.1 with a simple but absolute statement about our condition before God: we live, he says, in the valley of death itself. He begins by showing us the absolute darkness of our spiritual condition before God; this is the extent of our lostness. And so you read in v.1:

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins – you were DEAD in a pattern of life marked by transgressions and sins, he says!

Before God, he says, all people, without exception, are by nature spiritually dead in transgressions and sins. **You and I are born spiritually dead, in a fallenness expressed in a propensity to always oppose God and to always move away from Him.**

To transgress is to cross a boundary: to challenge a limit in front of you; to deviate from a path that has been set for you. We hear God's truth and we do the opposite. We hear God's purpose for us and we challenge it. We hear God's direction for us and we look for alternatives.

You may say: 'that's not me', but it is. You and I are transgressors because the Bible tells us that no one is 'righteous'. (Romans 3:10: *'there is no one righteous, not even one.'*) Romans 4:15 says, *'where there is no law there is no transgression'*, but there is a law; there is a God who is above all, who sets the moral standards of the world we live in, who says there is a truth that applies universally to all people, who determines what is right and wrong, and whose holiness defines life. Because of that, there are transgressions because no one is righteous; no one perfectly and completely hears, obeys, and lives by His truth, commands, and laws.

To sin is to fall short of God's standards: to fail to meet God's standards. That's what it means **to sin**; to miss the mark and to fall short of God. We read in Romans 3:23 again; without exception, *'all have sinned, and fallen short of the glory of God'*. That's what sin is; no one makes the cut when it comes to God. That's what it means to fall short of the glory of God; everyone falls short of God's perfection. If God is a being who is supremely glorious, and if God is a being who is infinitely great, then He must also be infinitely great in His being and in His character; perfect in power, authority, strength, majesty, wisdom, righteousness, justice, compassion, love, joy, and kindness.

And so before such a God, **no one makes the cut, no one makes the grade; everyone falls short.** It doesn't matter how religious you are, or how much good works you do; we remain blemished, stained, fallen, sinful, and ungodly because God, in His infinite greatness and perfection, is the benchmark.

Isaiah 64:6 says: *'we are like the unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags.'* We can be kind but, before God's infinite kindness, we fail. We can be wise but, before God's infinite wisdom, we fail. We can be just but, before God's infinite justice, we fail. We can do what is right but, before God's infinite righteousness, we fail.

Too often we think that God is like us, but He's not. No one goes to watch a sunrise, thinking that the sun is like them or that they are greater than the sun. You go to watch a sunrise because it's not like you and because it is gloriously great. It's infinitely majestic; it's power overwhelming, to see the first rays of the sun cutting across the horizon, the warmth of its light falling on your skin, its light becoming brighter as it rises. And at some point you stop looking, don't you? Why do you do that? Because if you keep looking at the sun you'll go blind. Your greatness, radiance and majesty falls well short of the sun. You don't even come close, which is why no one gets up to watch you rise up each morning. **God is the sun in His being and in the perfection of His character; you are not, and in His presence we fall short in every way.**

Even more than that; in our sinfulness, we always move in the opposite direction. In our sinfulness, the default position of our hearts is to always move away from Him; the default position of the heart, outside of Jesus, is to always deny God His glory and to give it to another. You read in Romans 1:21-23: *'we neither glorify God as God nor give him thanks, and have instead exchanged the glory of God for images made to look like people and things in our lives'*.

We don't see or value the greatness of the sun; instead, we elevate other things over the sun. When it comes to the one being in the universe who is infinitely great and perfect in His being and in His every character, instead of acknowledging His greatness, we have instead turned and ascribed greatness to lesser beings and to lesser things. When it comes to the one being in the universe who is infinitely valuable and perfect in His being and in His every character, instead of praising Him, we have instead turned and praised lesser beings and lesser things. It is like a man who walks into Tiffany & Co and is shown a \$25k diamond ring, but instead of acknowledging the beauty, worth, and value of the ring, he starts to argue for, to praise, and speak of the far superior beauty and greatness of Cubic zirconia instead.

That's what we're like: we give worth and value that belongs to God alone, in His infinite greatness and majesty, and we ascribe it to other people and to other things in our lives. We exchange God, in His infinite greatness and beauty, for lesser things in our lives. We take what is rightfully His and we give it to another, trampling on His worth as God. **We are idolaters who are dead to God and alive to everything else (E.g. devil, world, flesh).** In the presence of infinite greatness, worth, and beauty, we turn and praise Cubic zirconia instead. Instead of praising the sun we praise the beams of light. Instead of being in awe of the ocean we glory in the streams. That's what we're like when it comes to God; we have removed Him and replaced Him with substitutes in our lives.

This, Paul says, was the state of the soul outside of Jesus: your soul outside of Christ. Ephesians 2 says that this was your pattern of life '*in which you once walked.*' This was the trajectory of your life: you were living as a spiritually dead corpse opposed to God; your affections were dead to God; your mind was blind to His truth; your will was enslaved; your heart was in the grip of idols, taking God's glory and giving it to your idols in life.

He doesn't say that you were in danger of dying or that you were terminal, on the verge of spiritual death. He doesn't say that you were injured or sick, partially alive, trying to reach out for help, or crying out to God to save you. He doesn't say that you had fainted spiritually and needed to be revived. **He says your soul was dead:** powerless, helpless, unable to and incapable of responding, not wanting to know God, and refusing to go His way - a life only knowing transgressions and sins. And here is the news you must grasp: (this is the universal condition that also applies to those who are still outside of Jesus) '*we all once lived this way ... like the rest of mankind ... dead in our transgressions and sins*' (v.3) These verses are telling you that we have never been free. Free will is a myth. Dead people are not free to respond; dead people are powerless: they are dead.

This, Paul says, is the abyss, the pit, and the valley of death you were in before Jesus saved you, and many are still there, living in this state: the walking dead, made up of men and women who don't know Jesus; dead in their transgressions and sins. This tells me that you can be physically alive but spiritually dead on the inside. You can be intellectually brilliant but spiritually dead on the inside. You can be a financial success but spiritually dead on the inside. You can be a picture of health and success outwardly but spiritually dead on the inside. **Without Jesus, and apart from Jesus, your soul is dead within.** (In the economy of God, you are either a missionary or a mission field. You are either alive in Jesus or dead in transgressions and sins.)

When 73-year-old Adele Gaboury turned up missing in 1990, her neighbors in Worcester, Massachusetts, informed the police. Her brother told the police that she had gone into a nursing home. Satisfied with that answer, Adele's neighbors began keeping an eye on her property. Her neighbor Michael Crowley, however, noticed that her mail, delivered through a slot in the front door, was piling high. When he eventually opened the slot, hundreds of pieces of mail fell out. He notified the post office and the mail deliveries were stopped.

Adele's next-door neighbor, Eileen Dugan, started paying her grandson ten dollars twice a month to mow Adele's lawn. Later, Eileen's son noticed that the pipes outside the house had frozen and that water was spilling out the door. The water company was called to shut off the water.

All of Adele's neighbours were trying to help but none of them ever bothered to look inside her house. When the police finally inspected Adele's house four years later, they were shocked to find her body in the kitchen; she had died of natural causes, and had been sitting in her kitchen dead for the last four years. (*NY Times* – 1993).

All around her home everything looked fine; everything was business as usual. And for four years, hiding the reality of what was on the inside, she was dead. Dead people don't cry out for help. Dead people don't respond to your call. Dead people are powerless to do anything. That is the picture of your soul. Apart from Jesus you are spiritually dead. Just like Adele, everything looks fine on the outside until you begin to look within.

And as you hear Paul's words you begin to discover that our problem is even deeper than our sin; our problem is even greater than the things we do wrong; our problem is even deeper than God's judgment and wrath that's coming because people exchange God's glory for idols in life and give value to what is worthless rather than their creator (Romans 1:18ff). Yes we need forgiveness of sin; we need redemption, someone who is able to take and absorb God's wrath and judgment in our place, but we need something much more than that because Paul says you and I are spiritually dead. **We need a resurrection, we need to be raised from the dead, and we need to be made alive!**

If you were locked up in a prison, you might groan and cry out for help. You might say you're sorry. You might make some promises to be a good person. You might even cast yourself on God's mercy. **But what can you do you if you're in a morgue? What can you do if you're dead?** And the answer is 'nothing'. You can do nothing about your condition, your situation, and your state because the dead are powerless and helpless.

You descend into the valley of the soul and this is what you find. Here is the Bible's view on the condition of the soul outside of Jesus: apart from Jesus you're dead at the bottom of the ocean, 35,000 feet under in the Mariana Trench. The weight of water above you is six tons per square inch. You've been there for a thousand years; rotting away and decaying: a corpse at the bottom of the ocean. You are dead and totally unable to ask for help or do anything.

From the Bible's perspective, you are not caught in a rip; drowning and calling out for help. You are at the bottom of the ocean in absolute darkness, a corpse dead: helpless and powerless to do anything.

Spiritually you are not standing on the edge of the top of the building, about to fall off and asking for help. From the Bible's perspective, you and I are spiritually dead; splattered on the side walk and can't even cry for help.

We are spiritually dead when it comes to God. This is an overwhelming testimony of Scripture. Our minds are hostile to God; it cannot submit to God's law, and it cannot please God.

Romans 8: 6-9:

The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; 7 the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. 8 Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God.

We are deaf to the words and teachings of Jesus. (John 8:43) Our eyes are blind to the greatness of Jesus.

2 Corinthians 4:4:

The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

Our minds cannot grasp the truth about Jesus. We hear the truth concerning Jesus and we think it's foolishness.

1 Corinthians 2:14:

The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.

Our minds are darkened and our hearts are hardened when it comes to God.

Ephesians 4:18:

They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts.

Our hearts and minds have no desire for God. We do not move towards God and we do not seek Him; we move away from Him. The propensity of the human heart is always away from God.

Romans 3:9-12:

⁹*What shall we conclude then? Are we any better? Not at all! We have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin. ¹⁰As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one; ¹¹there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God.*

God looks at the world we live in and He sees a cemetery of dead souls; He sees a valley of corpses; He sees a morgue of men and women who are spiritually dead: who will not, cannot, and do not move towards Him, His truth, His word, or His way.

And what Paul wants us to see is that outside of Jesus, without God first taking the initiative with us, our situation is absolutely hopeless because we are powerless to do anything to save ourselves and because the dead cannot do anything; they cannot cry out for help and they have no ability to respond. Their heart, mind, eyes, ears, and hands are closed to God; dead.

Often you'll hear people say: 'God helps those who help themselves'. (75% of Americans believe this is what the Bible teaches. It's pretty close in Australia too). The vast majority of people (and church people) think that the Bible teaches that God helps those who help themselves; that God helps those who respond to Him; God saves those who work at it; God helps those who make an effort, and God saves those who put the hard yards in. **But here we read the very opposite.** You are dead outside of Jesus. Dead people cannot help themselves, dead people cannot respond, dead people cannot work, and dead people cannot make an effort.

In fact, the Bible teaches us the very opposite: *God helps the helpless.* God saves the powerless; God raises the dead so that they might respond; God raises the dead so that they might understand; God raises the dead so that they might grasp and take hold of Jesus, so that they might see the truth of the gospel!

Ascending the Summit Of Grace: 'But God ...' vv.4-7

Where there is no relief, hope, or rescue - where the spiritually dead are buried; where men and women live as slaves and are the objects of God's wrath for trampling on His glory (v.3) - God acts graciously. You're on a road destined for destruction, with no desire to move in any other direction until God steps in and takes hold of you! And so v.4 comes to us dramatically and suddenly with

this great announcement: **‘But God!’** (In the ESV version and New Testament Greek the first words are ‘But God!’)

And so you read in Ephesians 2:4-5, in speaking of those who are dead in their transgressions and sins:

⁴But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—⁶and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

God helps the helpless: that is the abundance of His mercy and grace. Unless God first acts to resurrect us spiritually, we remain dead in our transgressions and sin. Unless God first unveils our blindness, we remain in darkness. Unless God first gives us life, we are unable to respond to Him.

2 Corinthians 4:6:

*For God, who said, “Let **light shine** out of darkness,” made his **light shine** in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. [God illuminated your heart and mind to Jesus.]*

John 6:65:

*He went on to say, “This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has **enabled** him.” – God enables you to come to Jesus.*

John 5: 21-21:

For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it.

Ezekiel 36:26:

*I will give you a **new heart** and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.*

John 3:3:

*In reply Jesus declared, “I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is **born again**.” → 1 Peter 1:23: For you have been **born again**, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God – the gospel.*

And Paul says to us: look at where you once were outside of Jesus and where you once lived - the abyss that you were trapped in and the valley of death that was your home; this is what you were before Jesus saved you. You did not choose Him, you did not desire Him, you did not want Him, and you did not ask to be His; you were moving away from Him. You were dead, helpless, and powerless. But in His mercy and love and grace, He made you alive with Jesus even when you were dead.

God resurrected your soul. He breathed life into your soul; He took you out of the shadows - the darkness and the blindness - and brought you to life and lifted you, so that you might see and respond to the greatness, glory, and grace of Jesus. This is now our cry, ‘I am Yours, not because of what I’ve done but because of what You’ve done! I am Yours, not because I am able but because You are able!’

So as we come to v.4, we begin to climb out of this valley of darkness; we begin to ascend up a summit. We move from the depths of our fallenness outside of Jesus, to the heights of God’s provision for us in Jesus. We move from seeing our inability and powerlessness outside of Jesus, to

seeing God's enabling power and grace in Jesus. We move from the valley of death and begin to ascend to the summit of God's glorious grace.

Two Words Make the Difference – 'But God ...'

Our salvation, hope, freedom, forgiveness, lives, and eternity, as believers, hangs entirely on those two words: '**But God!**' We were dead, orphans; **but God** made us alive with Jesus! We were enslaved, lost; **but God** raised us up with Jesus! We were under judgment, condemned, and facing an eternity in hell; **but God** instead says He will hold you up in eternity as a display of His glorious grace and kindness in Jesus!

And so where the bad news ends, there is good news, and this is where the good news begins. We are told that God intervenes in our lives; God acts to take hold of us; God saves because He is rich in mercy and His love is great!

Ephesians 2: 4-5:

⁴But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵even when we were dead in our trespasses, acts to save us.

God looks at those who are spiritually dead, who have lived their lives trampling on His glory, who have despised His worth, and who have lived their lives enslaved and chained to the world, devil, and sinful self; who are objects of His just wrath, and who have no desire to know Him or love Him. And He **explodes**, not in anger but in mercy, mercy that is rich because His love is great. The idea there, behind the words '**rich in mercy**', is a wealth of endless supply; an overflowing abundance that knows no end. God's mercy is an endless ocean, as unnumbered as the grains of sand on a beach; a never ending horizon that goes on and on and on. That's what you find as well in the Old Testament as we read of the 'steadfast love and unfailing kindness' of God.

Psalms 36:5:

Your steadfast love, O LORD, reaches to the heavens, your faithfulness to the skies. 6Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains, your justice like the great deep.

Psalms 78:16, 20

Exodus 34:6:

The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness,

And so God sees my need, my idolatry, my spiritual state, my captivity, and my inescapable destiny; I am someone who is deserving of wrath and judgment. But instead of leaving me where I am, instead of crushing me, and instead of being angry, He shows me endless compassion, overwhelming kindness, continued tenderness, and overflowing mercy. And the reason why God is merciful is because His love for you is great (v.4). Why is God merciful? Because His love is big (and also because of His great love for you, and because of the great love with which He has loved us). God's love is not stingy, lacking, cautious, or limited; it is large! It is a love that is bigger than your situation in life, your sinful condition, and your circumstances; a love that cannot be stopped by your sin, a love that is not conditional, and a love that is not bound.

And the vastness of His love is expressed in mercy shown to those who do not deserve it, '*even when we were dead in our transgressions.*' (v5) Even in your fallen, corrupt, lost, dead, captive, unlovable, unforgiven, and unresponsive condition, God loved you and showed you mercy.

Romans 5:8:

But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners – his enemies, Christ died for us.

1 John 4:10:

This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

APPLICATION:

This should be a great source of comfort to us who know Jesus! God loved you when there was nothing good in you, when you were dead, enslaved, an enemy, unattractive, unlovable, and unresponsive. So He's not going to be surprised by anything He discovers in you (nor by your sins that rear their ugly head; that weigh you down, cause you grief, lead you to sometimes doubt God's love for you, and think or feel that He cannot love you). God has already seen the worst in you before He made you His son and His daughter. When you stuff up and discover sin in your life, you might be surprised but God is not going to be surprised, and neither is He going to turn away from you because He has seen the worst in you and He loved you, and showed you mercy. God has never loved you and shown you mercy because you were attractive; He loved you at your worst, when you were spiritually dead.

We read here that God has loved you even when you were dead in your sins. His love doesn't depend on what you are; it flows from His own heart of love and mercy. **It is not love of anything good in us; it is love for us because of everything good in Him.** Here you see the greatness of His grace, in that God loved us even when we were dead in our sins; devoid of life, in captivity, and unresponsive.

And so in His love and mercy, He does three things in us and for us as we ascending the mountain of grace:

1. **He Made us alive (v.5)**
2. **He Raised us up to new life (v.6a)**
3. **He Seated us up in the heavenly places (v.6b)**

It all takes place in that phrase '**with Jesus**'. He made us alive with Jesus, He raised us up to new life with Jesus, and He seated us in the heavenly places with Jesus.

Fundamental to the gospel is not just the work of Jesus for us, and external to us, but that we are now united to Jesus in a real way (we are now in union with Jesus by the work of the Holy Spirit - that is what makes all the benefits of the saving work of Jesus effective in our lives. Before you became a Christian **you were separated from Christ** (v12), and so separated from all the benefits of His saving work, **but now in Christ** (v13), all the benefits of His saving work have come to you.) Unless (and until) I am in union with Jesus or united to Jesus by the Holy Spirit, His saving work remains unapplied in my life.

1. **Made Alive With Jesus**

And so the first thing Paul says is that God, in His love and overflowing mercy, did this first in your life: '*... even when we were dead in our transgressions, he made us alive together with Christ.* (v5) God visited that morgue where we laid dead, and He caused us to be made alive with Jesus.

Dead people do not respond. Dead people cannot make themselves alive. Dead people are powerless and helpless. This is the miracle of the new birth and resurrection that God, in His mercy, brings about in our lives.

The first thing God had to do was bring you to spiritual life because you were dead. He moved you from a state of spiritual death to spiritual life, and it took place when the Holy Spirit brought you into union with Jesus. He made you alive with Jesus

Paul is speaking of the miracle of the new birth (regeneration) where God, by the Holy Spirit, unveils the blindness; where He unclouds the mind; where He changes the heart so that we might be alive in Jesus and to Jesus.

2Corinthians 4:6

For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

John 3:5

Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. 6 Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.

Ezekiel 36:26-27

26 And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. 27 And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.

Titus 2:4-7 4

*But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, 5 he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration (new birth) and renewal (new life) that comes by the Holy Spirit, 6 whom God poured out on us richly **through** Jesus Christ our Savior, 7 so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.*

Ephesians 2:10 says that you are God's workmanship and masterpiece, created in Christ Jesus (not when you were born, but when you were resurrected spiritually). The picture there is God calling into existence something that did not exist before. Paul is speaking of the new birth: the new life that comes about **in Jesus** – being made alive!

He brings the spiritually dead to life; the orphanage is filled with corpses, and God brings them to life! Colossians 3:4 says that Jesus is our life.

John 5:21:

For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, the Son also gives life to whom he wishes.

2. **Raised With Jesus**

But even more than that, God, in His love and endless mercy, didn't just make you alive. He raised you up with Jesus to new life, and He seated you with Jesus!

We're not just made alive. We are now given to experience the resurrected life of Jesus; we are given the power of the resurrection as God's new creation (2 Corinthians 5:21: *'Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away – captivity, slavery, patterns ... is gone; behold, the new has come.'*)

God, in His grace and mercy, doesn't do an incomplete job in saving us. There's not much use in raising us to life and then saying, 'you're on your own now; get to it.' No; the love and overflowing mercy of God extends to raising us to new life in Jesus, **empowering and enabling the new life** He gives us.

You read in Colossians 2:12 that we were buried with Jesus in baptism, and so united and joined with Him in His death, so as to rise with Him in His resurrection. Colossians 2:12 says that *'having been buried with him [Jesus] in baptism [united with Him in His death], you were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead.* With Jesus, a co-

resurrection takes place as you are raised to life and to a new life. And so you go on to read that you are not only made alive, but raised to a new life!

Colossians 3:1-2:

If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ²Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.

(Colossians 3:5 says that you should put to death everything that belongs to your earthly nature. It tells you what to put on instead as you read on. The call to live transformed lives is grounded in your resurrection with Jesus, **to life and to a new life!**)

God, in His love for you and in His endless mercy, planted you with Jesus in death; and in the resurrection of Jesus, He raised you to life and to a new life; that's what He did by His Holy Spirit. He grafted you into Jesus, **to give you life and to give you a new life.** John 15 says, *'I am the vine, you are the branches – apart from me you can do nothing.'* Jesus is the vine, who not only gives us life but also enables us to live new lives, as His power and enabling flows through in our lives by the Holy Spirit. And so we're not just made alive, but we're also raised to new life, to be free from what once enslaved us.

Galatians 5 says that freedom in Christ is by the Spirit who now dwells in us, to enable us to live out that freedom in Christ and to not live self-centered lives, but lives that are marked by the love we have known in the Father. **Note:** He hasn't just replaced your heart of stone with a heart of flesh; He hasn't just given you a new heart. He has given you a changed heart and a transformed heart: a heart alive to Him; where He is your treasure above all things, and where He is supreme in the affections of your heart.

Romans 6:5-11

⁵For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. ⁶We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. ⁷For one who has died has been set free from sin. ⁸Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. ⁹We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. ¹⁰For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. ¹¹So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

What Paul is saying is that, in your union with Jesus and in being united with Jesus, you are no longer enslaved to your sinful nature. You are raised to new life! You're no longer dead to God; you're now alive to God, the God whose glory and worth you previously trampled. You are now raised to new life where He is the supreme object of your worship, joy, and delight.

When you were dead, God, in His love and abundant mercy, joined you to Jesus by the Holy Spirit, and you received all the benefits of His saving work! The Holy Spirit made you alive in Jesus (and unveiled that blindness, brought light to that darkened mind, changed that stone heart, and broke the chains of enslavement), and then you were raised with Jesus, in power, to begin living out that new life.

The same power that raised Jesus from the dead - over sin, death, and Satan - now works in you because you have been raised with Jesus! The air is no longer stale; you are now breathing fresh air. You're no longer confined in a room filled with darkness; you're basking in the sunlight.

But it gets even better! As you ascend this mountain, as the sunlight begins to shine, as the air smells fresher, and as you begin to break through the clouds coming out of the valley, you discover that the mercy of God extends to securing your eternal future because Paul also says that we are

now seated with Jesus in the heavenly realms. *He [has] raised us up with Jesus and he seated us with him in the heavenly realms.* (v.6b)

3. Seated With Jesus

God is not satisfied in just making us alive or empowering us to live for Him; He does all of this already, in uniting us with Jesus. His mercy and love is also out to ensure that we'll be there at the end, that we'll make it to the end. See the glory of grace – from the orphanage of death to life, to a new life, and finally brought home forever. My eternal security does not depend on me but on the God who is rich in mercy, and large in His love for me; who secured it in Jesus. At the cross my future has been secured.

And so we're told that God has enthroned you with Jesus in the heavens. You are there with Him enthroned because the Holy Spirit has united you with Jesus when you were made alive. God, who is rich in mercy and filled with love for you, took you, made you alive, raised you to new life, and put you on a throne with Jesus in heaven!

So you are counted and regarded as God's sons and daughters with Jesus on the throne, reigning with His Son; right there beside Him. Paul says that you have been enthroned with Jesus. You are made alive to God with Jesus, raised to life with Jesus, and thus enthroned with Jesus! And it's not just a future reality, but a present reality. We are not just raised with Jesus in the past tense; we are also seated with Jesus.

An important point to grasp is that this is the **glory that lies ahead for us**. We are not free from the stains of sin that we struggle with but our enthronement is already accomplished; we have the status of sons and daughters right here and right now. Our identity is with Jesus in heaven. *'My life is hid with Christ who is in heaven ... and when Christ who is our life appears, then we will appear with him in the glory of heaven ... but we're there right now in Christ.'* (Colossians 3:3-4)

Eternity has been compressed into a present reality in God's perspective as He looks at you. You are the object of His mercy and love right now, which means that He sees you as a son or a daughter in His kingdom. I still see myself from the perspective of my present humanity and my sinfulness, but God has so secured my eternal destiny that He allows me also to see that I am already an heir of God my Father, and a possessor of the glories of His kingdom. My status is one of an enthroned heir of heaven.

You sit on a throne with Jesus right now.

APPLICATION:

How you see and live your life today - your walk as a believer and your view of life - all depends on where you sit. Your standing in life, or your walk in life, depends on where you sit.

The Queen of England exercises certain power and privileges because she sits on the throne; she also lives reflecting the values of her throne. The US president has privileges and powers because he sits behind the desk in the oval office; he also lives reflecting the values of his office. The same holds true for us who are saved. We are seated on the throne with Jesus where God, by his grace, has placed us; not only enabling us with power to live as His sons and daughters, but also to reflect our identity in the way we live our lives.

So look up. Where you sit, shapes the way you will stand, walk, and live. You are a citizen of heaven there with Jesus, and you are a son or daughter of God there with Jesus; that's where we should keep our hearts and minds. It is not just my home but my inheritance, my destiny, and my goal. It's not this life, nor this world, nor this career, nor this business that is my home.

For the people of God, home is where they are already enthroned with Jesus - where your life is hidden with Christ. (Colossians 3:3) It is secured in heaven, waiting for you, and held for you - which is why, **to live with our hearts and passions directed at the world, and to live with the affections of our hearts set on this life, study, world, career, business, family, and children, is to forget what we have been saved to.**

And the great tragedy is that most of us, and our people, live with our eyes looking down and not up. We are looking at the things we were once enslaved to and desiring them, thinking that this is all there is, that God has saved us and that's it, and that it ends there with nothing more to follow. But He's saved you from something to something greater in beauty and worth, to an ever expanding experience of God's mercy and love, extending into eternity. And there's more.

Psalm 84:10:

10 For a day in your courts/house is better than a thousand elsewhere; [all you miss out and sacrifice in this life will be made up in a single minute in His house, and all you have suffered in this life will be made up in a single minute in His house.]

I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness

Guess what? You're not a door keeper. You're a son or daughter of the God who is overflowing in mercy and love, who has put you on a throne with His Son. That is your identity. That is who you are in reality. Yet we desire the lesser things in this life. Our taste buds and our preferences reflect anything but our home and our Father, the God who is rich in mercy and love, and the God who is to be our supreme treasure and delight in life above all things.

Jonathan Edwards says:

... all those things you so live for, money, family, children, career – they are but shadows, God is substance, they are but beams of light, God is the sun, they are but streams, God is the endless ocean.

O what a tragedy it is when God's people trade shadows for substance, beams of light for the warmth of the sun, and streams of water for the endless ocean. Here we are being told that in the gospel – where we are made alive, and raised and seated with Christ – you have been brought to the substance, the sun, and the endless ocean of mercy, love and kindness in Christ

J.I Packer, in his book *Knowing God*, puts it like this:

Do I, as a Christian understand myself? Do I know my own real identity? Do I know my destiny? I am a child of God. God is my Father; heaven is my home; every day is one day nearer. My Savior is my brother; every Christian is my brother too.

Remember who you are; remember who you belong to; remember your inheritance, where you are going; remember where you sit, you sit enthroned with Jesus in heaven

It should be the life, beauty, worth, and glory of Jesus that holds our affection. It should be God, rich in mercy and love, who holds our gaze. It should be Jesus whom we treasure and cherish above all. It should be our identity in Jesus that shapes our walk. We live as sons of another kingdom, in a foreign land waiting to go home. We live as aliens in exile. Why would anyone want to be a jelly fish, carried around by currents in the seas of the world, when you can be a dolphin and swim against the currents and tides? Jelly fish aren't free but dolphins are free.

You are made alive with Jesus, raised with Jesus, and seated with Jesus. God's endless mercy flows out of His great love for you, securing you from start to eternity with Him.

There are two famous children's stories that I want to mention: *The Adventures of Pinocchio* by Carlo Collodi, and *The Velveteen Rabbit* by Margery Williams. Both stories are about toys that want to be real, they want to be alive.

In *The Adventures of Pinocchio*, the main character Pinocchio is told that if he's a really good boy he'll get to be real and he'll come alive. So he works hard till he's good enough and is transformed. In *The Velveteen Rabbit*, the rabbit is told that if he is loved enough he'll come to life and he'll come alive. He tries to stay clean and fluffy, but over time he gets ratty and dirty and worn out; buttons start to fall off. Because he is no longer new and beautiful, he's dumped, thrown out, and on the verge of being burnt up with the garbage. But because of the love of a little boy for him at the last moment, and because he is loved, he comes to life.

People spend their lives trying to be like Pinocchio, relying and depending on their good works, and striving to earn God's love and win His affection. But, in God's economy, we are Velveteen Rabbits who are made alive, raised to new life, and enthroned, not because we're good but because we are loved by God in His Son. O the glory of grace!

It is the very reason why Paul says it is by grace that you have been saved. I am rescued from death, enslavement, and judgment, and I am raised to life, enabled to live a new life, and placed on a throne to be forever with Jesus. And **it is all the work of God**, who is endless in mercy and great in love for you. (My part is nil, my potential is nil, and God's part is everything, and God's motivation is His love and mercy.)

God's Great Purpose – You Are a Trophy of His Grace!

God has done all this, this act of sovereign grace, *so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable and incomparable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.*

This is God's great purpose in doing all this for us: so that in eternity we will serve as **trophies of His grace**, so that in the ages to come, us being there will testify and bear witness to the overflowing, abundant, and incomparable grace of God in Jesus. A grace that, we're told, has no comparison (incomparable), a grace that is unsurpassing and unlimited (immeasurable; you can't measure it. It goes on and on and on forever). In Ephesians 3:8, the gospel is described as the unsearchable riches of Jesus, which refers to the mercy, grace, and kindness that is ever expanding and never ending.

It's Paul's way of saying that you can go as far as you can and you will still find a beyond; rise as high, and you will find a higher still; go as far below as you can, and you will still find a beneath; that is his description of God's grace in giving us everything in Jesus (Ephesians 3:14-19 tells us to comprehend this love that is incomparable and immeasurable. It will never run out for you into eternity – the breadth, length, height, depth of the love God in Jesus).

See the ultimate goal and end of the gospel. Ultimately God is out to secure praise for His glorious grace. He is showing off His grace, not once at the cross, and not twice, but in every expanding measure to us as recipients of His expanding love and kindness to us into eternity. That's what v.7 is saying: it is the conclusion of the gospel, brought to a climax. We are saved for His own glory, in order that He might receive the credit, praise, and glory. And rightly so because no one else deserves praise, no one else is worthy of honour, and no one else should be able to claim credit for saving grace. (The goal of the gospel is not me but the glory of God in Christ, in saving grace).

And when he holds you and me up in eternity, it will be so that the universe, the heavens, creation, and you and I, will praise God's grace. We are saved to be held up as trophies of His grace so that the universe might see His goodness, His grace, and His kindness, and you will too! (I will see you there and praise God's grace. You will see me there and praise God's grace. This is the whole point of Ephesians 1:3-6: we are '*chosen, predestined to be adopted to the praise of his glorious grace!*') When you see a turtle on a fence post, you know it didn't get there by itself. It's obvious someone has put it there. In a very real way, believers are like turtles sitting up on the top of a fence post, put there by the grace of God to display God's grace, in showing His kindness to them (in rescuing them, in making them alive, raising them to new life and seating them, and making them heirs with Jesus). They are there as trophies of His grace on that eternal fence post!

A patient after a major surgery is a living testimony to the skill of the surgeon and not to their own ability, strength, or skill. A condemned man after being shown reprieve is a living testimony to the king's mercy. We are the exhibits of God's skill, and trophies of His grace.

And what I want you to realize is that God used what you were originally destined for - an eternity as the objects of His wrath, enslaved and dead in your sins – and saved and made it into a masterpiece to display His infinite grace into eternity. You were a spiritual disaster, whose spiritual destiny was destruction, but God made you a masterpiece in His collection to display His grace!

In eternity and for all eternity, in year after year, in decade after decade, in age to age, and as the object of His kindness, you will be an ongoing and ultimate display of His incomparable grace. You will be the jewels who display His grace for all eternity. God will hold me up, and hold you up, and He will receive the praise for all eternity; I will become the recipient of His kindness for all eternity. God holds me up so that He is praised for all eternity, and so I can enjoy His kindness for all eternity. God displays me as the object of His mercy and grace so He gets credit forever, and I can enjoy His kindness forever, in every increasing measure into eternity.

The myth is that the experience of God into eternity is static because we know everything about Him already. This is wrong because you and I will always be finite creatures, and God will remain God, but we will know and experience more of Him in every increasing measure - His love, His kindness, His grace, and His perfections.

Lamentations 3:22:

The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; ²³they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. ²⁴"The LORD is my portion," says my soul, "therefore I will hope in him."

How can something be new tomorrow? How can the steadfast love of the Lord be new tomorrow? It was new yesterday, and tomorrow it will be new again, but that's only possible **if my experience of that love tomorrow is greater than yesterday.** If yesterday my experience of the love of God was new, and tomorrow it is also new, it cannot be the same as it was yesterday or else it wouldn't be new; **it must be greater, and it is greater and ever expanding into eternity!**

Such is the steadfast love of God: ever widening and ever expanding because God is infinitely glorious, and His infinite love demands an infinite experience of it. It doesn't get any better.

God's purpose is to display and magnify His grace in His Son, and we are the recipients as He does that, where He will express it in His kindness to us throughout the ages, as an ongoing display and an ongoing experience of His kindness through the ages. How many ways can you experience kindness? God is going to spend His kindness on us not for a few years but in the ages to come.

He's going to keep doing this, He'll never run out of ways to show you kindness, and as He does that, you will be a display testifying to His grace and enjoying the kindness of God forever, in ways that will go beyond your experience of kindness today; a kindness that will never run out.

APPLICATION:

That is my destiny: to be the object of God's mercy and grace and kindness, so that in eternity I will be a trophy that speaks of, shines, and reflects the infinite, unsurpassing, incomparable, and limitless grace of God in Jesus; to be a trophy that will forever experience His endless kindness in Jesus. This is the summit we are to cherish, desire, delight, and treasure. It doesn't get any higher or greater; this is the beyond, this is the substance, this is the sun, this is the endless ocean, and this is the horizon that never ends. It is an eternity as the object of God's incomparable and endless grace in Jesus; to be shown kindness forever, to the praise of God's glory and grace, with Him and in Him.

It's God's grace that saves me, that enables me to live for Him, and keeps me secure in Him. It is God's grace that will be praised, and that will be mine, now and into eternity. ('You are forever mine and I am forever yours!')

Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound, That saved a wretch like me. I once was lost but now am found, Was blind, but now I see.

When we've been here ten thousand years Bright shining as the sun. We'll have no less days to sing God's praise Than when we've first begun.