Ephesians 2:4-7

But…GOD!

Sermon

The title of the message this morning is… But…GOD! Two words that really don't need any explanation. We have all had our "But God" moments. ***Can you remember some in your life?***

An insurmountable object came along…BUT GOD! God comes in and moves the object! You're backed against the Sea….Two mountains on either side, an army coming against you, BUT GOD SPLITS THE SEA IN TWO. He comes through…and He does it in a way TOTALLY DIFFERENT THAN YOU thought He ever would. Not one of the Israelites, not even Moses thought, "it'll be ok…God is going to split the sea."

The series we are going through in Ephesians is "Raised to Life"…we're looking at the greatest obstacle, and the greatest miracle ever known to man – REGENERATION. God takes a dead human heart, and pumps His fist upon its lifeless chest…and miracle of all miracles – the heart begins to beat for the very first time. Faith… sight… glory is seen! We love to be inspired, we love stories that inspire…big obtacles with glorious rescues. God created us for glory to be seen. Would the story be worth knowing and worth telling if the insurmountable obstacle was not sovereignly placed by God?

Last week I mentioned the story of Lazarus because the story of Lazarus is a physical parable for us of what happens spiritually when someone is born again. You have the Son of God who resurrects from the dead, you have His Word as the means by which Lazarus is made alive, and you have a dead man resurrected. That's basically my story! Is it your story? God is in the process of writing your story right now…will it be worth telling? Are you willing to embrace the obstacle in order to allow God's glory to shine all the more brightly? Let's think a bit more about the story of Lazarus and what it can teach us about a God who resurrects from the dead…

Jesus had received word that Lazarus was sick (Jn. 11:3) and He said something very peculiar:

> **"This illness does not lead to death, It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it." (Jn. 11:4)**

Lazarus is sick, and "it is for the glory of God", and, it is "so that the Son of God may be glorified through it." ***His sickness…for God's glory***. How does that sit with you? This is where our understanding of who God is and why God does what He does is challenged. God is sovereign, and God is good, and He is fully capable of preventing sickness, and yet He allows for sickness to demonstrate His glory.

In the next verse John tells us:

> **Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. SO… when He heard that Lazarus was ill, He stayed two days longer in the place where He was. (11:5)**

If I were writing the story, it might read something like: "Jesus loved Martha, Mary, and Lazarus. So when He heard that Lazarus was ill…He ran the entire way, immediately, and healed him." That's how I would write the story. That's not what John tells us. Jesus loved them…THEREFORE…***because of His love*** for them, He stayed two days longer! What!? What kind of friend does that?! He's actually being a

great friend! They just don't understand! So often we don't understand why God is doing what He is doing in the way He is doing it! Jesus loved them, therefore He refrained from going to heal him, because He had something so much greater to do…a story to be told for ages and ages to come.

Over and over we see this in the Bible. **Consider the story of Joseph**. God allows Joseph to be sold into slavery by his own brothers because of their jealousy, and then after being raised up in the house of Potiphar, Potiphar's wife lies about Joseph and has him thrown in prison for a wrong that he did not commit, but it was through someone he meets in prison that he is given an audience with Pharaoh, and is able to interpret Pharaoh's dream and then is raised to the highest position in all of Egypt next to Pharaoh himself. Looking back on it all, Joseph gained a very different perspective and learned some valuable lessons about God…

> "***God sent me before you to preserve life***… ***So it was not you who sent me here, but God.***" (Gen. 45:5-8).

"God sent me into slavery. It was God who had me thrown in prison. Yes he used your jealousy as a means. Yes He used the lies of Potiphar's wife. But what the devil meant for evil God has used for good." Can you look back on your life and say that, "what the devil meant for evil when _____ happened, God used for good! If you don't see it yet, you may still be in the middle of the story. The greater the obstacle, the harder it is to see it. Joseph understood that God orchestrated it all. His sovereign hand was guiding everything – He never stopped loving Joseph. God knew that a famine would one day come, and that Joseph's position in Egypt would provide the rescue for Jacob and his family.

Back to Lazarus…

The plot thickens and Lazarus dies. Which is really confusing for His disciples because Jesus said, "this illness is NOT to death". Jesus finds out and says this to His disciples:

> **"Lazarus has died, and *for your sake I am glad* that I was not there, so that you may believe." (Jn. 11:15)**

So…It was for the glory of God and the Son of God that Lazarus was ill. It was also because of His love for Mary, Martha, and Lazarus that Jesus refrained from going to heal him. And, Jesus was ***glad*** that He wasn't there to heal him, and it was ***for the sake*** of His disciples that He wasn't there to heal him…so that they would believe.

God does not delight in evil. He doesn't delight in the death that sin causes. God hates evil, hates illness, hates suffering, hates sin – there will be no more of it in Heaven – and yet He loves us, He wants to build our faith, He wants for His glory to be displayed, which is what is best for us, therefore, God allows for evil to endure…for now.

Let's see if we can see this in our passage…

v.1 – "And you were dead in trespasses and sins (we talked last week about how this was our condition prior to faith in Jesus. We were dead, and our spiritual deadness resulted in walking, living, following after all manner of sin. Our passions were corrupt, we were sons of the devil, our fallen will corrupted

the body and mind, and we were by nature children of wrath. This is a devastating diagnosis of our separation from God owing to our sin in Adam and our own willful sins and trespasses)…**v.4** – **BUT GOD** (two huge words! They are climactic. They are everywhere in Scripture…in each story, like glory shining in as the apex of the story. We were dead…but God MADE US ALIVE! Lazarus…COME FORTH!) **being rich in mercy, and because of His great love…v.5 - made us alive even when we were dead**…(notice the stark contrast between our awful condition and God's glorious power, love, and mercy. Our spiritual death has set the stage for the glory of God's resurrection power, love, mercy, and grace to triumph over evil!)…v.6 - **God "raised us up with Him", God "seated us with Him"…all things under our feet in Jesus….v.7 - so that** (this is known as a purpose clause – Paul is giving us the greater purpose of our death, and His raising us from the dead…it was SO THAT…) **in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus."** (So that in the coming ages the glorious story of God's rescue will be told and marveled at forever and ever!)

Two points this morning…

- **First, God's provision of life**
- **Second, God's display of immeasurable grace that triumphs over death**

1. God's provision of life (Eph. 2:4-5)

There is a glorious word that breaks forth in these verses….MERCY! We learn of God's mercy, because of God's wrath. If we did not know of God's wrath, we would not know of God's glorious mercy. Mercy is "not getting what I deserve". Our death in Adam, provides God the opportunity to show forth His MERCY! God does not delight in our sin and death, but God delights to show His love and mercy and grace. Therefore He has allowed for sin and death to come to pass. Our spiritual condition provides God the opportunity to shine forth His RICH MERCY! We were "by nature children of wrath like the rest of mankind", but "because of His love" for us, God has pulled us out of the muck of humanity to be "vessels of mercy who are prepared beforehand for glory" (Rom. 9:23).

Notice the *objects* of regeneration and mercy

They are those who are "made alive together WITH CHRIST" (v.5). Salvation is only in and through Jesus Christ. Paul has already spoken at great length about our union with Christ. That "in Christ" we are recipients of the Fathers many spiritual blessings (1:3-14). He has chosen us (1:4), predestined us for adoption as His sons and daughters (1:5-6), provided redemption for us through His blood (1:7), given us revelation into His glorious plan to reconcile all things in Christ (1:9-10), and inherited us and sealed us by His Holy Spirit for our future day of redemption (1:11-14). Now here we see yet another blessing IN CHRIST…He has "made us alive with Christ" though formerly we were "dead in trespasses" (2:5).

Notice also the *results* of regeneration and mercy?

LIFE! The Holy Spirit produces this! It's amazing that every symptom of deadness described in vv.1-3 is turned right side up in these three words, "made us alive". We were formerly spiritually dead, now, miracle of all miracles – we are ALIVE. Being alive, we now have new "dispositions" and "affections"! We are now at war with the flesh where before we had no quarrel with it! We formerly had dead passions, now all of a sudden, our passions have changed where we actually desire to know God. Our

will was dead to God, now every day we have this strange and strong inclination within to choose to follow Jesus while denying ourselves. Your mind, body, passions, and will are now alive to God. Just like Lazarus, God has taken what was dead and made it alive.

In 2 Corinthians Paul tells us that we were blind to God, but God has "***shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."*** (2 Cor. 4:6). We were blind, regeneration has caused us to see. We were dead, regeneration made us alive.

Now God's mercy and love are extended forever towards His children every day

> **Lamentations 3:22-23 - The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; [23] they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.**

This is music to my ears. God is a God of love and mercy! He doesn't have to be! He could simply give me what my sins deserve, but He continues to lavish love and mercy upon me! God's steadfast love for His children never ceases…His mercies never come to an end…every day, we need His mercy. Do you need mercy today? Of course you do! Every day He is faithful to provide mercy. Think of how many times you have pleaded with God – "MERCY!" And every time His love for you in Christ Jesus causes Him to give you mercy that you do not deserve. He is, v.4, RICH IN MERCY. God has an unlimited storehouse of mercy to cover our unending, daily, sins and transgressions. The devil wants to lie to you…that God's mercy has run out…that He is finally done with you this time!

Maybe you feel like there is no way that God could ever forgive and accept someone like you…God is RICH in mercy! You could never earn it! You could never deserve it! You can trust in His mercy…it is an endless supply!

Maybe you're here and you feel like there is no way God could continue to forgive you when you've tried over and over but failed again and again – Paul would say to you, God is RICH in mercy! Lift up your head Christian, in Christ there is an abundance of mercy and forgiveness. No, you are not worthy of it, but He seeks His own glory in it! He knows all of our sin, and yet chooses to not hold our sins against us. Christ has paid for every sin - past, present, and future - with His own blood that was shed for His children!

I'm reminded of the song "His Mercy is More":

> ***What love could remember no wrongs we have done***
> ***Omniscient, all knowing, He counts not their sum***
> ***Thrown into a sea without bottom or shore***
> ***Our sins they are many, His mercy is more….***
>
> ***STRONGER THAN DARKNESS, NEW EVERY MORN***
>
> ***OUR SINS THEY ARE MANY, HIS MERCY IS MORE***

God, because of His RICH MERCY, and BECAUSE OF HIS GREAT LOVE…has MADE US ALIVE.

2. God's display of immeasurable grace (Eph. 2:6-7)

It's a grace that is greater and triumphs over death. A grace that provides a story forever and ever. Mercy is not getting what you deserve….but Grace is getting what you don't deserve. I love how in v. 5 Paul breaks into a declaration of God's grace. It's as though Paul's words are building and building and He just can't contain himself any longer so he bursts forth with this declaration right in the middle of what he's writing – "BY GRACE YOU HAVE BEEN SAVED!"

There was a reason why Jesus allowed Lazarus to die, and there is a reason in this text for God to allow spiritual death….it's so that God can shine forth His power in raising us from the dead so that He might show His "immeasurable grace" forever and ever! We will forever be glorying in the grace and kindness of God that is in Christ Jesus forever and ever!

Now, think back to 1:19. Remember that Paul began to pray in 1:19 that we would KNOW:

> **what is the *immeasurable* greatness of His *power* toward us who believe…that He worked in Christ when He *raised Him* from the dead and *seated Him* at His right hand *in heavenly places*. (Eph. 1:19-20)**

He prays for them to know God's *immeasurable power* displayed by *raising and seating* Jesus in the *heavenly places*. Now he completes the thought here in 2:6-7: God has "made us alive together with Christ"…

> **and *raised us up with Him* and *seated us with Him* in the *heavenly places* in Christ Jesus, *SO THAT* in the coming ages He might show the immeasurable riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. (2:6-7)**

Do you see the connection? The immeasurable power of God in "raising and seating Christ in the heavenly places" (1:19-20) and "raising us with Christ and seating us with Christ in the heavenly places" (2:6). So that He might show the immeasurable riches of His grace in the coming ages – forever and ever. (2:7). GOD IS WRITING A STORY AND ITS GLORIOUS!

God loves you, and because He loves you He sees beyond your circumstances to something great. He doesn't want to give you temporary comfort, temporary joy….He wants to write a story of resurrection that will be marveled at forever and ever as we sing "Amazing Grace How Sweet the Sound that Saved a Wretch Like me" forever and ever and ever….and then a million years after that. God will forever be revealing to us new facets of who He is and how His grace is seen into the ages to come.

But for now… He allows for evil to endure…for a time.

Application

First, If you have received mercy, you ought to extend mercy to others. How I want mercy for myself, but I want justice for others! I was actually in my mind considering going out onto the field to let the referee know that he needed to call Isaac's soccer game better. I was actually at one point

considering this! The other kids were throwing their elbows and shoulders and it was very obviously blatant…and I just thought, "What's wrong with this guy! Blow the whistle!" Here I am, about to preach on mercy Sunday morning and I'm thinking, "where is the parent of number 15?" How we need to constantly be reminded that we need mercy and we need to extend mercy to others! Who do you need to extend mercy to in your life right now?

Second, Is there something in your life right now that God is allowing that you wish He would take away? He is writing a story…and it is a glorious story. Maybe you have been waiting and waiting and you just can't see the end of this…but just know that God has a purpose in it. He always does! God loves you! One person said, "God I know that you love me…but do you think you could love me less?!" It's helpful sometimes to think back on His past faithfulness. He walked you through something challenging, and at the end you were glad for what He taught you or how He came through in the end. He loves you, and He has a plan, and He is surely wanting to reveal something to you about Himself through this….and what you see will be worth the pain and suffering. It might be hard now, but just keep trusting in Him.

ALSO….tell the stories! Don't let your past sufferings be wasted…people need to hear your "But God" stories! It will give you so much joy to tell it…and they will be comforted through the comfort that you have received from God!

Finally, if you are here, and you haven't yet surrendered to Jesus as your savior and your Lord…please know that there is mercy provided in the cross of Jesus Christ. But apart from mercy there is wrath. Either Jesus will hang on the cross as payment for your penalty and the wrath that you deserve or one day you will face the penalty and the wrath you deserve! You do not know when that day is…don't put this off! If you are here, and miracle of miracles, you believe…receive Jesus by faith today! He is RICH IN MERCY! He will not turn you away no matter what you've done.

Pray