

God's amazing kindness in Christ

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[0 : 00] Let's begin with a word of prayer. Father God, we thank you for your wonderful word, your self-revelation to us.

! And we ask that this evening your spirit will apply your word to our hearts and lives, that we may understand and that we may know you working in us.

For we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, thanks so much for inviting me.

We were just recalling a time when David and Judy came over to the United States and met us. And I don't know quite why we didn't have them stay in our house.

Maybe it was that we had a very small type of pasta, vicarage, or maybe we already had people with us. But they were commenting how we sent them to a rather strange couple who offered to have them and gave them an opening meal.

[1 : 09] And then at breakfast the following morning they had to ask where they might get breakfast. And they said, well, down the road in the shop down there. So, we've not always treated you, obviously, as well as we should have done, David.

Our friendship goes back a good long way. And that's wonderful. And to see the Lord at work in your life and our life and the lives of many of you. That's what we long for, isn't it?

That God will just use us and that we will grow in our love for him. Well, I said when I was being asked those questions that my goal really is that we may get to feel the joy that Paul has in Christ. And that that may be our joy as we look at these verses. This evening we're starting with what I've called God's amazing kindness in Christ.

Now, really, that could be a title for the whole weekend. But have a look at, do open your Bibles because we'll be looking at them fairly closely.

[2 : 16] But Paul uses that word kindness to sum up what he's talking about here. In chapter 2, verse 7, he says, He speaks of the incomparable riches of God's grace expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.

And in chapter 1 and the opening verses of chapter 2, Paul lays out for us some of this amazing richness. These riches that we have in Christ.

And they are incomparable riches, says the Apostle Paul. And it's summed up in the kindness of God to us as his people.

So I hope that this will encourage us all in our faith as we look again at the kindness of God revealed in Jesus Christ. Now, those of you who have young children will know that sometimes they run their mouths off, don't they?

You know, they start chattering. Especially at a certain age, I don't know, three or four. I can remember going and picking up my daughter at school.

[3 : 29] And we walked down the road. And I didn't get a word in edgeways. Well, she just chatted and chatted and chatted and chatted. She filled me in on her whole day and friends and everything under the sun just went on.

She was so excited at being able to talk to me about her day. And it may not be a direct parallel, but we sort of get that feel as we look at what Paul does in this opening two chapters.

He just, especially this first chapter, he just, as it were, runs his mouth off. And I'm going to hand you a sheet. Because this is the only sort of bit of technical stuff I'm just going to do for you.

But maybe we can just hand these around if that's all right. Let's just see if you can all see what I'm getting at here. Hand some of these around. All it is, is the verses 3 to 13 of the passage that you've got in front of you.

But I've highlighted a few things. Because we'll only really get a feel for what Paul is doing if we see it in this way.

[4 : 42] You see, I'm sure you picked up, as it was being read to us, how Paul repeats. How it is so Christ-centered, this passage. He repeats again and again, in Christ.

That phrase, in Christ. What is not so clear, because our versions sort of put full stops in and things that aren't there in the Greek, is that verses 3 to 13 here are just one sentence.

And what I'm doing with, if you just have a look at the paper in front of you, bear with me, because I'm going to try and just give you a feel for this passage. And I'm not going to spell out every word, all right?

But just give you the emphasis. Verse 3, praise to the God who has blessed us in Christ. Verse 4, he chose us in him to be holy in his sight.

Verse 5, in love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ. Verse 6, to the praise of his glorious grace which he's freely given us in the one he loves.

[5 : 46] Verse 7, in him we have redemption through his blood. Verse 9, God made known his will which he set forth in him. Verse 10, to unite all things in him. Verse 11, in him we were also chosen.

Verse 12, we who were the first to hope in Christ. Verse 13, you also were included in Christ. In him you also, having listened to the word of truth, you were marked in him with the promised Holy Spirit. It's just a long bubbling sentence in which in Christ, in him, in whom, in the one, is the recurring theme.

What Paul is laying before us is the staggering things that are the blessings, the privileges that you and I have in Christ.

And as he begins to lay them out, he doesn't lay out all the blessings we have in Christ here, but he just goes on and on.

[6 : 53] And eventually you feel like, Paul, we think, probably used scribes to write, so he probably dictated.

And you begin to think, just how fast was Paul speaking when this scribe was writing all this down? It's a mind-blowing.

Can you get the feel for it? Paul is just saying, in Christ do you realise what we have? We have this, and this, and this, and this, and this, oh, and this, and this, and this, oh, and this, and this, and this, in him, in whom, in Christ Jesus.

So I hope that gives you just a sort of feeling of this long bubbling sentence and clearly Paul wants us to understand what it is to be in Christ. So what does it mean?

And for this we need to look at the title Christ. Christ. The name itself. You see, the name Christ is much more than just a surname for Jesus.

[8 : 02] We talk about Jesus Christ, and I think sometimes we think, well, Christ is sort of his surname. You know, I'm Paul Gardner. Jesus is Jesus Christ. But that isn't what it is.

Christ equals the Messiah of the Old Testament. It's the Greek translation of the word Messiah.

Messiah equals the son of David, the anointed one from God, the one who follows in David's line.

So what is Paul saying when he refers to Christ? And I think a lot of people miss this in all of Paul's writings. Christ carries with it, almost always, the sense of kingship.

He's the king. He's the son of David, as Paul lays that out in Romans 1 very clearly. He is the king who is on the throne.

So when he says we are in Christ, he's saying we're in the king. But what does that mean? Well, here we have to go back to the Old Testament.

[9 : 16] I said this would be the only bit really of technical stuff we'll get. But in the Old Testament, a lot of the understanding of how kings worked was shared across all the nations of the ancient Near East.

The king represented his people. Literally, he summed up his people. If one nation wanted to fight another nation, if they could kill the king, they'd destroy the nation in effect.

Because the king represents the people. He represents the nation. And in the Old Testament, we see something very similar happening. God, of course, is primarily the king.

But then they appoint, the Israelites appoint their own king in Saul, who makes a mess of it, and then God gives them David. And David comes to stand, as it were, representing his people before God.

Not quite like a priest, but not dissimilar to that. And so what we find is that in David, the nation is blessed because David is a righteous king.

[10 : 35] He represents them. What is true of him is true of his people. And later on, the same is true when they turn away from God.

Usually, it is the king who is highlighted for his paganism, and the people follow. The people are summed up in him.

Israel is judged. Why? Well, because the kings led the people astray, or they allowed the people to go their own way, or whatever. At times of revival, like with Josiah and Hezekiah, when the people return to Christ, when they return to God to worship, they do so because their king leads the way. He represents his people. The God he worships, we will worship. And some of this is carried right through into the New Testament.

Christ our King, the King of all who believe in him, represents us. It's like all of us who belong to him are summed up in Christ.

[11 : 50] When he died on the cross, he died representing all who have faith in him. That's where we most clearly see it, don't we, as we talk about the gospel.

He dies for us. He represents us on the cross. So much so that the Apostle Paul can say in Romans 6, now if we died with Christ, we believe we will also live with him.

In other words, Paul is saying, he so represents me on that cross that I can say I have died with Christ. Now Paul hadn't died, but Paul is so understanding that the King represents me.

What is true of the King is true of me. He has died, I have died. He is alive, I am being made alive. He is the Son of God, I am a son adopted by God or a daughter adopted by God. What is true of the King is true of his people.

[12 : 59] And that's the essential theology Paul is getting at when he says we are in Christ. It's an incredibly important teaching and we have to try to grasp it even if it seems rather alien to us in this age.

So this is why Paul says there in verse 3, Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

Christ. Just think about that sentence for a moment. It's a bit strange, isn't it? You see, right now we're not in the heavenly realms, are we? He has blessed us in the heavenly realms.

We're not there, are we? I mean, I don't know about you, I love Newton Abbott, but I don't feel like it's the heavenly realms, all right? I, you know, due respect, Exeter may be a bit closer, but not really.

We've just been to Norway, Norway's definitely closer. But it's a strange way of explaining things, isn't it? But you see, what Paul has got in his mind is that we are there in the heavenly realms at the moment because that is where our King is.

[14 : 20] He represents us. So he actually says that in chapter 2, if you look on to chapter 2, he actually talks about how, sorry, I've got to find it, he actually talks about how, verse 5, he made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions.

It's by grace you have been saved. And then he talks about, somebody can help me with the verse that we, oh, there we are, in verse 6, God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus.

Well, as I say, I don't feel like I'm seated in the heavenly realms, but the truth is that I am there because my King is there. He represents me. As I say, this is difficult stuff for us in the Western world, but this comes all the way through the Bible and it is a fundamental teaching for us to understand how it can be that we have blessings in Jesus.

So as we look at this passage, we start, of course, with verse 2 and Paul says, grace to you and peace from God, our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ. grace and peace is a wonderful summary of the gospel, isn't it?

He prays that the Christians in Ephesus may know the peace of God, that is, the forgiveness of God and reconciliation with God. And I'm going to say much more about that on Sunday morning in the sermon.

[16 : 01] But he begins with that word we all know so well as Christians, the word grace. In fact, Paul uses that word grace nine times between chapter 1 and chapter 3, verse 8.

Nine times. It's just, again, one of his big themes. So let's just remind ourselves of what grace is. Grace means simply God's unmerited favour.

God's unmerited favour. Specifically, that we deserve nothing, yet God has mercifully saved us, forgiven our sins and drawn us to himself.

If I can give you a slightly deeper definition, grace is, if we read scripture, grace is that driving passion of God that reaches out from himself to love his people and to call them to himself in such a way that when people hear his call, they cannot turn him down.

That's grace. The passion of God reaching out to people with all his love in such a way that they can't say no to him.

[17:32] Because it's just too wonderful. Too marvellous. Of course, the Ephesians knew all about God's grace. God had come and had worked a miracle in the lives of many of them.

In the book of Acts, we're told something of how evil Ephesus really was as a place, how dark it was. We read that as people became Christians, they brought out their books of magic. Just in their own homes, they'd have books of the occult. And they brought those out and burned them in the market square. Diana, the goddess, was the sort of big goddess of that city and was worshipped there.

People from all over the empire came there to worship. This was a dark city spiritually. And yet, God in his grace, his passion for reaching out to people who are sinners, had seen the gospel preached through Paul and many had come to faith.

So many that we read the silversmiths who made all the idols for people went out of business. It's an extraordinary story of conversion in that city.

[18:49] He has blessed us, says Paul, in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ and it's summed up in this incredible word, grace.

God's work for us. So that's where Paul starts in verse 3 as he now breaks out into that long bubbling sentence of praise for all that God has done for us.

His grace towards us all done in Christ. And in the next few verses he lists some of these blessings he refers to in verse 3.

He's blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing. And what are those blessings? And that's where he gets excited. that's what leads to this long bubbling sentence.

So point 2 in the outline you have in front of us. He chose us in Christ before the creation of the world. Paul starts right back at the very beginning and it's an amazing thought.

[19:58] In heaven Paul is saying this, in heaven God in his wonderful plan of salvation for sinful people saw through the time when he would create the earth and men and women.

He saw through the time when they would rebel and sin and turn against him and right back then before the foundation of the world he formed his plan to show his grace and his love.

it's a whole concept that almost seems impossible to us to grasp and yet that's what Paul is saying and God made this plan from before the foundation of the earth in Christ so that you and I would come to receive these blessings.

You and I in the thought in the plans of God from before the foundation of the earth that we should become his people in Christ.

That's what he's saying and it's we have to say in many ways it's too much for us to understand and yet it is staggering.

[21:22] God planned for your salvation for my salvation in Christ he planned to send Christ to show his grace and his love to people from before the foundation of the earth.

And why did Christ do this? Well why did he reach out in grace to people? He did this not just because it sounded like a nice idea but because it was his plan all along that there would be a people in the world who would be as he puts it there at the end of verse four holy and blameless in his sight.

This is why Jesus came to die so that through faith in Christ people would respond to him and would become imitators of him. That they would be a reflection of him on this earth holy and blameless and that the world would look and as Paul says in chapter five verse eight where he summarises this amazing grace he says for at one time you were in darkness but now you are a light in the Lord walk as children of the light.

So what is Paul getting at here? Paul believes obviously as an orthodox Jew he believes that God created and he believes that when God created Adam and Eve just as the Bible says they were created pure they were created holy they were created to image God that's what Genesis 1 says he made them in his image but what did they do?

Well they messed up as we know they sinned and eventually they're thrown out of the garden of Eden and the problem after all of that is how can men and women ever do what they were originally

created to do?

[23 : 28] How can they image God? How can they reflect his love his goodness his joy his desire his heart for people how can they image that if they're now outside the garden?

If they no longer have God in front of them if they can no longer access God and it is that that is being undone as Jesus comes Jesus who is holy and righteous as we trust in him and come to be his children Christ the king represents us not Adam in his fallen state but Christ in all his holiness the judgment on the garden of Eden is being undone but more than that you see what God is doing is ensuring that his original purposes for this earth and for mankind are fulfilled his purposes are that there would be a people who would be holy and blameless and would image him there would be reflections of him filling the earth that was the mandate from Genesis 1 and that is what Christ enables as he comes to this earth and dies for us in Christ this begins to be possible again until eventually in the new earth we will fill the earth as people made perfect in his image and Genesis 1 will be ultimately fulfilled in all its perfection this is what happens in Christ the apostle Paul refers to the first Adam and the second Adam it starts again in Jesus this was always God's plan that there would be a people who are holy and blameless in his sight who would testify to the wonder of the heavenly God who loves his people and this happens says Paul in Christ but why why does it happen to you and me why did it happen to the

Ephesians he says look in chapter 5 verse 8 for at one time you were in darkness but now you are light so why did God do all this well the Israelites asked the same question back in Deuteronomy 7 when they were talking when God was talking about how he chose them and so on and they asked the same question and he simply says in Deuteronomy 7 verse 6 God himself gives them the answer he says it was because the Lord loved you it was because the Lord loved you it wasn't because you were a greater nation anything like that the Lord loved you and that's where point 3 here that's where Paul goes that's where he goes next in verse 5 God loves us in Christ in love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ in accordance with his pleasure and will to the praise of his glorious grace which he has freely given us in the one he loves in love God did it and as God worked out his will in this sinful world that rejected him so his glorious grace becomes clearer and clearer and what does this love lead to in our lives well Paul mentions three things first adoption Paul says in verse 5 he is the father who adopts us as his sons and daughters that's how much God loves us is it any wonder that the apostle bubbles over with praise my son and his wife live in the United States 14 years ago they had a daughter but they were unable to have any more children so two years later they adopted another girl a tiny and beautiful baby girl maybe some of you here are adopted my son and his wife love their adopted child every bit as much as the one who is theirs biologically even though the two girls are from different races they don't distinguish between them in their love for both girls now of course not all human adoptions work out brilliantly because we're sinful beings but it does provide something of a picture of us for us of how the father loves his son Jesus

[28 : 38] Christ so much and yet in Christ he adopts us to be his sons and daughters as well and loves us as much as he loves Jesus Christ the son of God God's love leads to a second thought here not just our adoption but there in verse 6 to the praise of his glorious grace which he has given us freely in the one he loves there's the love he has for Jesus you see and here's another truth that we should excite us God's love is given us freely and undeserved in Christ now here in the UK we have something which is definitely not true in the United States and that is that we have health care as we put it free at the point of delivery it definitely isn't free at the point of delivery in the United

States you pay and then you might get health care right but here even when it doesn't work terribly well it's free at the point of delivery it's pretty special it's one of the reasons we retired back to England actually it's we may criticise the NHS but it is it is pretty special but you know someone does actually have to pay it may be free at the point of delivery but we know someone has to pay yeah we pay for it in our taxes somebody has to pay but in receiving forgiveness it's very similar if we didn't pay somebody does have to and that somebody is Jesus to use the biblical term this means and here's the third great joy for Paul as he thinks of God's love

God redeems us in Christ verse 7 in him in Christ we have redemption through his blood the forgiveness of sins in accordance here it is again in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us he chose us before the foundation of the world he did all this out of his love he even adopted us as sons and daughters in this wonderful worldwide family he gave us all this freely and even as he redeemed us in Christ no wonder Paul talks of the riches of God's grace but Paul

still isn't finished there's one other heading number four here the mystery is revealed to us in Christ God he says in verse 9 made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure which he purposed in Christ the mystery in Paul's writing this is often misunderstood you know people talk even as

Christians about well the faith is very full of mystery no I'm afraid it isn't not if you're biblical it really isn't God has revealed the mystery in Jesus and what is the mystery in the Bible the mystery is this actually it goes right the way back to Daniel but the mystery is this God promised to Abraham that through his descendants the whole world would be blessed and the mystery is through Jewish history right through the Bible through the Old Testament the mystery is this how can that happen God has blessed Israel how will the nations be blessed that's the mystery and that's what's revealed in Christ what is revealed in Christ is how you and I if we're not of Jewish background if we're Gentiles which probably most of us are right how will we be part of this package of salvation only in Christ our king represents us so the issue in the New Testament for both Jew and Gentile is the same who is your king king who is your king if it is Jesus then you are part in Christ of this amazing universal fellowship which includes people of different races including all Gentiles all Jewish people all who come to faith in Christ Christ that's the definition that's the revelation of this incredible mystery how could the Gentiles be saved God had promised Abraham that all the nations would be blessed but it seemed later that this was only for the

[34 : 07] Israelite people so how would people like you and me not born as Israelites be saved and God in his love makes sure that salvation isn't just for one race look at verse 13 you also you Gentiles you Ephesians Ephesians of all people from that pagan evil dark city as Paul calls it you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth the gospel of your salvation the mystery is resolved in Christ if we come to faith in him then as our king he represents us we're in him truly anyone from anywhere in the world can experience the saving love of Christ through faith in this king and that is why we take this message out to the world anyone anywhere through faith in this king now do we want to take a breath do we want to just pause a moment this is one sentence from the apostle Paul it just can't stop it is all so unbelievably marvelous this is the grace of God the love of God the mercy of God the salvation of God and it is all in

Jesus God has called even us to be a people verse 12 who will live for his praise and glory and so this weekend let's ask ourselves am I as excited as the apostle Paul about what God has done for me in Christ maybe you've been feeling lonely maybe you've been feeling unloved recently then look at how the father has loved you in Christ and brought you to himself and placed you in his family and the church maybe you don't have a loving father you'll hear tomorrow a bit from my wife but she had a very different background to mine and now you can look and you can see how in Christ you have come to know and have access to a father who is beyond human thinking in his love and his grace and his wonder his care for us maybe back home you don't have a loving family but here in Christ we're part of God's loving family adopted children from all over the earth loved by him adopted forgiven redeemed you also were included in Christ says Paul this is truly God's great kindness to us or maybe you feel that sin has overtaken you then look again in faith to Jesus and for his forgiveness and remember that in Christ you are forgiven and redeemed I hope this evening you've seen in God's word here even if for the first time in your life perhaps the face of our king and our redeemer the face of Jesus and something of the amazing kindness of our heavenly father which reaches out to us to you even this evening and says come unto me all who are heavy laden and I will give you rest there's an amazing hymn talking of this gospel we're not singing it this evening but the words go like this and it was written by

John Kent who interestingly was born in 1766 in Biddeford in Devon and he wrote this sovereign grace over sin abounding ransomed souls the tidings swell tis a deep that knows no sounding on its glories let my soul forever dwell oh such love my soul will ponder love so great so rich so free why oh lord such love to me hallelujah grace shall reign eternally let's pray father do speak to us from your word that we may know more of the wonders of the blessings that we have in Christ for we ask it in his name amen

I think we're going to sing of that as we finish aren't we we are before we sing very easy to hear a message like that bringing such glorious truths out and we nod and we go wow yeah that was great and then we go out and we've forgotten it all so before we do stand and sing our final song just going to give you three or four minutes just on your own as Juzi plays quietly in the background to think maybe of two questions what struck you tonight what glorious truth has warmed your heart

write something down you've got some spare pages at the back use one of those one thing that struck you tonight what's going to you and your life following Jesus now because of those things they're not just meant for our heads they're meant for our hearts and our lives so two things something that struck you tonight and what are you going to do with it two or three minutes just sit and think reflect on what you've heard from

[40 : 39] Paul and then we'll stand and sing of God's grace as we close