

# The Riches of Mercy - Communion service

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Preacher: Rev Douglas Mackeddie

[ 0 : 0 0 ] I would like us to turn to words we read in the epistle of Paul to the Ephesians and chapter 2.

Reading at the beginning of the chapter, And you hath he quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins, where in time past you walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now works in the children of disobedience, among whom also we all had our conversation in times past, in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind.

And were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love forwith he has loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ.

By grace you are saved, and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come, he might show the exceeding riches of his grace, in his kindness toward us, through Christ Jesus.

Verse 4, Now I'm quite sure that it is the activity of the believer as they approach a time like this, we may do so with great intrepidity, sometimes maybe with a fear that is more man-centered than it is Christ-centered.

[ 2 : 2 0 ] When we come before God in this kind of way, having responded to the invitation that Jesus has given to us to remember his death, I'm sure there are times when we reflect on the way that God has led us.

We're like that passage in the Old Testament in Jeremiah, where it says, look down the valley from whence you have come. And sometimes when we reflect upon that valley, what we see there maybe would put greater fear upon us, and maybe we would be inclined to say, I cannot go to the table because of all that I know of myself.

But of course we remember that God knows a lot more about you than you know. And there is much more there that God knows that if we knew it all, we would hardly ever move one foot in front of the other.

But you see, we come before a God who is, as we have been singing and reading, who is a God of mercy, a God full of grace, a God full of love.

And the Apostle Paul, in this particular letter to the Ephesians, is addressing a situation that might not have been found exactly in the church at Galatia, or at Corinth.

[ 4 : 0 4 ] But the one that Paul is addressing here is the church with regard to its unity of purpose and desire. And here he is drawing attention to the very thing that will bring about an ever-increasing unity between the brothers and sisters in Christ.

Now please, I don't say that, make that kind of statement, giving some kind of suggestion that I am thinking for one moment that there is great disunity amongst you.

I don't believe that for one moment. But what I do believe is that what the Apostle Paul is drawing to attention in this passage, if anything at all, it should encourage greater unity between us in Christ Jesus and to enjoy fellowship together in Christ Jesus.

because without Jesus, we have nothing. Paul is talking to some of these Ephesians, particularly those who had come to faith, those who were of the Gentile spirit, whose background was maybe not like that of some of the Jewish converts.

But nonetheless, the message is no less for them, for the Jews, as it is for the Gentiles, for the Gentiles, and for you, and for me. Because I think it is, it does us good, at least if we approach it in a positive way, it does us good to reflect on the way that the Lord has led us.

[ 5 : 43 ] Never thinking to ourselves that we are something that we are not. Because we know we are not what we should be. and we know also that in many occasions in our walk of Christian life, we come very far short of the glory of God.

But what Paul is reminding us of here is not in any way to bring about a situation of spiritual depression. We know that as we look down the valley of our lives, that there are certain things that we would want to forget.

that they even ever happened to us. We wish they never happened in our experience. But the reality is that's what it was.

And even if your life and mine, and I'm not suggesting my life was in any way pure, never. But one thing is sure, when one reflects upon the way that the Lord has dealt with us, and the way that the Lord saw us and looked upon us as we said the other evening, what he saw was a desperate situation, a great need.

And that is portrayed surely in this passage itself. As Paul says here, at the beginning of this chapter, he says, you who hath quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins, where in time past you walked according to the course of this world.

[ 7 : 17 ] Paul is not identifying certain types of people here. What Paul is doing here is identifying it's all in relation to God.

We have all sinned and have come short of the glory of God. None of us in any way whatsoever can suggest that my life, even in his past pre-Christian days, was any better than anybody else's.

What that might tend to address within us at times is a feeling that, well, God should look upon me more favourably and more mercifully than he should upon anyone else.

But if I take what Paul is saying is right, he is making a reference to every single one of us. We all have come short of the glory of God and what he is saying?

We walked, he said, according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now works in the children of disobedience.

[ 8 : 21 ] We remember the times when we were in disobedience to God. Oh, I don't mean just at that moment when we were converted, but we remember that even before that, on numerous occasions, our conscience would prick us and we would be aware that what we were doing and what we were about was not after the manner that God would wish of us.

But he is emphasising here that all were in that position, all had sinned and come short of the glory of God. and we ask ourselves, what has happened to make such a difference of the life that was down that valley, the life that we would rather forget?

What has happened? What has changed? Well, the Apostle Paul wants to tell these Ephesians, you have experienced something of supreme importance because, as he says here, he says, but God who is rich in mercy for his great love for which he has loved us.

Now, the contrast between what we once were and what we are now is immeasurable. We can't really calculate the difference that has taken place.

We could say it in the words, once, as the blind man said, once I was blind, now I see. It is very difficult for us to measure everything that has happened and taken place.

- [ 10 : 01 ] Only that we know that once we were blind, once we were in unbelief, once we were like the rest of this world, we were fulfilling everything that the bodily desires wanted.
- The desires of the flesh and of the mind and were by nature the children of wrath. And here's the rub, even as others.
- Not just them, but us. We were all children born in sin, shaped in iniquity, living in darkness, and living in unbelief.
- But as he says in verse 4, but God, who is rich in mercy, but is great love for which he has loved us. Now just think of that for a moment or two.
- God, rich in mercy. Again, it's something for us that is very difficult to calculate. because even with grace in our hearts now, it's very difficult for us to understand the full import of God's mercy.
- [ 11 : 22 ] But this way, I think we can see it at least in a little bit, in a little measure. If I was a hell-deserving sinner, what made the difference?
- was it that by some token of my own ability, I changed my walk and my conversation?
- I became something different by my own volition? Not at all. Long before I ever came to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, God was showing mercy toward me.
- And that's why I always think it's a good thing for us to do, to look down the valley of our lives experience. Oh, there are things, as I've said already, things that we would not want to even begin to remember.
- But what we can remember is that God has not given us over to the mind of the reprobate. We don't often think like that, do we?
- [ 12 : 31 ] Because we would all like to think of ourselves just that little bit above the commonality. But we have no right to do that. God, who is rich in mercy, having loved us through Christ Jesus, the immeasurable love, the immeasurable mercy, and yet we know what it is.
- because we can truly say, hitherto, the Lord has helped us. He didn't leave us in the waste-howling wilderness.
- He didn't leave us in the state of unbelief. He didn't leave us with a catalogue of sins that we were to be found in, as Paul speaks of in verses 1 to 3.
- No, rather, what he has done, he has shown to us as a people, hell deserving though we have been, yet his mercy has been displayed toward us.
- And surely that's something that is never out of your mind. Each day you rise, you think to yourself, and you say to yourself, is God not merciful?
- [ 13 : 45 ] not just today, but yesterday, in all the past of my history, God has shown mercy. If he hadn't, we would have been consumed in his wrath and in his anger long ago.
- And remember, if I'm speaking to someone this morning, if you don't know the mercy of God, if you don't know the freedom and the liberty of God, then what is your state?
- Or your status? You are a hell deserving sinner. There is nothing in you, no soundness within you that can in any way hold back the tide of God's condemnation and unbelief.
- Is it not the case, like as we read in John chapter 3 16, for God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.
- If you notice what he is saying there, they should not perish, that by the end of their own age or time in this world, what is awaiting them?
- [ 15 : 13 ] peace, tranquility, joy? No, if you do not have Christ in your heart and in your soul, you are in that miserable state where with God will cut you off and cast you into outer darkness.

the opportunity is given as it was to the Ephesians. Whatever might have been their background, whether they were Gentiles or Jews, it doesn't matter, it doesn't matter what your background has been, the opportunity is given to us.

Not because we are a better people as we saw the other day. Israel was not chosen by God because she was a better people, because she lived a better life, no far from it, but because God has set his love upon them.

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

What a word that is. Being quickened. The quickening of God in the life of an individual. Bringing about a huge change change, yes, a dramatic change, making us something that we never wear.

[ 16 : 40 ] He has. We who were dead in sins have been quickened together with Christ Jesus. What a blessing that is for all of us who believe and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, that God did enter mercifully upon our experience.

things. And I'm sure there are many testimonies even in this building today. People who can testify of the quickening, making the change in your life and in mine.

What he has done, not in the very distant past maybe, even fairly recently, bringing us out of darkness into his marvelous light, showing to us the greatness of being found, a new creation in Christ Jesus.

I always like to think of the conversion of the believer as a miracle. At least that's my perception and I'm sure it's yours.

It's hard to think that this life, as Paul says here, that this life that I once lived, in the flesh, fulfilling the lusts of the flesh and the desires, but now I've been quickened, I've been changed, made different.

[ 18 : 08 ] Just like Paul or Saul in the road to Amascus. What a change, what a miraculous change had taken place on that road. But Paul's miraculous conversion is no different to yours or mine.

The ability to repent of sin, we know that that was not of our own action, that was something that was put into us. You hath he quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins, hath quickened us together with Christ.

There's the transaction, there's the change, it's all because of the Lord Jesus Christ. And you know, when you and I think at this communion season, and I'm going back to something that I spoke about way back in 2007, I think it was.

He probably has a note of what I preached on before anyway. But I remember in 2007 I was here at the communion and something that drew my attention was something that we find in Galatians chapter 6 verse 14.

And that was how an individual can come and read about the cross, pour upon every single attribute of the cross itself and come to conclusions that we would never have come in the natural way of things.

[ 19 : 48 ] It could only be, as we'll come back to it, as a result of God's activity upon our lives. But what the cross of Jesus Christ had done, as I was saying that time, was it was showing to us the real measure of my guilt.

It's only when I look at the cross and see everything that I can even begin to perceive or understand about the activity of the cross, that there do I see the measure of my guilt.

I don't get it just through learning something in Sabbath school, or even sitting under the ministry of God's word, but it's when I come before the cross and let the cross of Jesus Christ dictate to my heart and to my soul.

There is the measure of my sin. We read that when Jesus went to the garden of Gethsemane, there he was.

Aside from his disciples, there he was, bending down, and as he looked into that cup, he saw the horror of it all.

[ 21 : 08 ] Now every time I would even touch on that subject, I would always say this is holy ground, so be careful what you are doing and how you are trading on it. Because the garden of Gethsemane is certainly holy ground.

But as he looked into that cup, what he saw was monumental. Now you and I can look into many things of experience, and we would want to sort of pull back from every single one of them.

But you can understand when Christ looked into that cup and what he saw, the very horror of sin. The cross of Jesus Christ demonstrates and displays to us the measure of my sin.

But more than that, what it does, it demonstrates to me and to every single believer in Christ Jesus with regard to the manifestation of God's love.

Let me read a few verses in Romans chapter 5. I'm reading at verse 6. For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.

[ 22 : 22 ] Get the picture? When we were without strength, there was nothing in us whatsoever, absolutely nothing, that in any way would enable me to lay hold upon those things that are a treasure to me now.

For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die, yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die.

And here comes the but. But God commended his love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

And you can take that one and apply it to yourself. When I was without strength, when I was made weak, when I was weakened, knowing the manifestation of my guilt and what I was deserving of, Christ stepped in.

And what did he do? through the manifestation of his love, he saved me, he redeemed me. Let me go back to John 3, 16 again.

[ 23 : 39 ] God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life. And here again it comes.

for God sent not his son into this world to condemn the world but that the world through him might be saved. And that's an important statement that we must never neglect.

Is it not? Because it takes away any kind of suggestion that the love of God presented in John 3, 16, although it is offered to all, it doesn't mean to say that all will benefit from it.

Because if they refuse to yield, they will be lost through their condemnation. Because remember, Jesus didn't come into this world to condemn the world.

And why do we know that? Why do I know that Jesus didn't come into this world to condemn the world or to condemn you and me individually or collectively?

[ 24 : 51 ] why? Because we were already condemned. We were already under condemnation. There was only one hope left for any one of us.

There was only one hope left for the Ephesians, for these Jews or Gentiles, whatever might have been their weaknesses as Christians. There was only one real hope and that was Christ.

As we keep saying, without Christ we have nothing. The means of salvation is to be found in the cross of Jesus.

Paul, writing to the Romans in chapter 4 and verse 25, tells us, he was delivered for our offenses and was raised again for our justification.

crucifixion. The cause of Christ's death, the cause of the crucifixion, was your sin and mine. There was no other way that God would accept any other form of sacrifice to satisfy divine justice but by way of the Son taking upon himself our sin and all its guilt.

[ 26 : 19 ] So, when we look at the cross of Christ, when we listen to what the Apostle Paul is saying here with regard to the richness of the mercy of God, when we were dead and sins have quickened us together with Christ, by grace you are saved.

and that's a very humbling thing. We all know what it is to experience the grace of God, at least, when I say that, all those who are in Christ.

But we don't always contemplate it and ask ourselves, what does this mean? What does this grace mean to you and to me as we come to the table of the Lord?

Well, put in a nutshell, pardon the expression, it is unmerited favour. Absolutely unmerited favour.

So, as I said at the beginning, when we come into a service in preparation for the communion and with all the concerns that we might have, the worries, the fears and so on, let us remember that there is nothing there that is commendable, it is all of grace, the divine favour of God to a poor, wretched sinner.

[ 27 : 46 ] Listen to what he says in verse 13, God, he says, but now in Christ Jesus, who you who were sometimes far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.

That kind of statement is an anathema to anybody in the world. Surely they would say to you, you don't believe that the blood of Jesus has got any efficacy or anything of import at all.

But by faith I know I have nothing without it. It is the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, that cleanses me from all my sin.

All those things that were pointed out to me in the first few verses of this chapter, of what I was, where I was, and where I was heading for. But now in Christ, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, I made a new creation.

And if I want to boast upon anything it is that, surely I made a new creation in Christ Jesus. Not in myself, but in Christ Jesus.

[ 29 : 05 ] And what a difference it makes. When you and I think of the cross of Christ and I remember talking about this before. But we ask ourselves maybe, you know, what does God want me to do?

And you as a believer, you stand at the cross, spiritually speaking, and you look at the cross and all that it is saying with regard to you. And then you listen to what Paul is to say to the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians chapter 5.

Let me read what he says there. because this is all going to do with the way forward as a believer. What motivates you? Every day you rise, what motivates you?

Listen to what he says. Verse 14. There is my motivation for serving the Lord Jesus Christ.

There is my motive to live in obedience to Christ. Why? Because he has said, it is said that if he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live for themselves, but unto him which died for them and rose again.

[ 30 : 49 ] And if you take it in the example of the Apostle Paul when he was writing to the Galatians, this is what he said, motivated, that with regard to Christ, is it not the case, he loved me and he gave himself for me.

So therefore, what can I do less than serve him by coming to his table in obedience to his word?

Shall we pray?