

The Great Love

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 23 February 2014

Preacher: Rev. James Maciver

[0 : 00] Will you turn now with me please to Ephesians chapter 2. Ephesians chapter 2 and for some time we're going to look at the words in verse 4, particularly the middle of or the end of verse 4, that God being rich in mercy because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ.

But we're going to confine our thoughts today to these words because of the great love with which he loved us. It's obviously difficult to take that out and extract it from the flow of the words that you find because everything there pretty much fits together in this great statement that Paul is making of how through the mercy and grace of God we've come to be saved through faith in Jesus Christ. But sometimes a phrase like that jumps out at you and it's perfectly proper and fitting just to take it in itself because it contains in itself, although it has a relation to all of these other truths and doctrines around it, it has so much in itself that's worth just considering on its own.

The great love with which he loved us. The great love with which he loved us. In human terms, where can you best see love?

Where can you best see love in human terms being shown or practiced? Some people will have different answers to that, of course. People might say, well, it's in people who have just newly fallen in love.

[1 : 44] They've experienced their love for each other. It's very new. It's very fresh. You can actually see that very clearly in their lives, the way they are to each other.

Some people might say it's in some couple that have been married perhaps for 60 or more years. And they've learned from living with each other different aspects to life.

You can see their love very clearly as it goes on, as it's matured, if you like, as they've grown together in the relationship. That's true. You can see love very clearly in that as well.

But I think one of the places where in human terms you see love most clearly shown is in the love of a parent to a wayward child.

Where a son or daughter continues on a life of wastage. Such as we've seen in Luke in chapter 15, the prodigal son, where the father daily, obviously, not just thought about it, but longed for his return back home.

[2 : 50] And as a parent grieves over a child's waywardness, as they've grown up into a wayward life, so too you see their love.

Their love doesn't end just because the child has happened to stray from the right path. In fact, if you like, there's an intensification in their love that seeks the welfare of that wayward son or daughter and longs for them to come back.

That kind of love, that aspect of love, is where love surely is seen at its best and in many ways at its strongest. And that's what you take with you into this great passage of Scripture as well.

Because you see the love of God most clearly in the fact that it's love for wayward sinners. You were dead in trespasses and sins in which you once walked.

Following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience, among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and of the mind, and were by nature the children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

[4 : 14] There's a great statement of where you and I are as sinners. Wayward children, wayward people, people not on that path of a right relationship with God at all.

However decently our lives may be outwardly, until God's grace changes us inwardly, this is where we stand in relation to God. But, God being rich in mercy because of the great love with which He loved us.

What is this love of God like? Because all the benefits that you find there, and all the other things that you find mentioned there, even the things that pertain to God Himself, the mercy of God, the grace of God, the way in which God reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ, the sending of Jesus Christ into the world, the death of Christ that lies behind so much of what's said there.

Where does all of that come from? Where do you trace all of that back to? What is it that's provided all of that for us? It is this one thing, and this one thing only, the great love with which He loved us. Nothing else explains why Christ came into the world. Nothing else explains how He died the death He died, and why. Nothing else explains His resurrection from the dead.

[5 : 42] Nothing else explains the work of His Spirit within us, bringing us to life quickening us, as it says there, making us alive together with Christ. Nothing else explains the building of us into one family.

Nothing else explains that, apart from the fact that it all stems from and flows from and is the consequence of the great love with which He loved us.

that's what you have to trace every single thing of spiritual benefit that you have. That's where you have to trace it back to.

The love of God. And there are three things about that love that I want to just mention and just expand on briefly because we're dealing with a subject which is really, in many ways, beyond our comprehension.

And supposing you spend the rest of your life studying the love of God, you'd never get to the end of it. You'd never reach the limits of it. You'd never say you know everything about it. Let's look at these three things.

[6 : 51] First of all, a powerful love. That comes across very clearly in the passage here because it overcame the power of sin and death.

It overcame that in terms of the way sin, our sin and our fallen Adam had brought death into God's creation into our own experience and in bringing that had alienated us from God the power of sin and the power of death as something that stands between us and God.

That has to be dealt with. That has to be taken out of the way. That has to be overcome. God cannot simply pronounce that we are saved without dealing with the issues that have come between us and himself.

And he has done that in Jesus Christ. Look at what it says there from verse 5. Even when we were dead in our trespasses he has made us alive.

He has quickened us together with Christ in union with Christ. By grace you have been saved and he has raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.

[8 : 07] And then all the way down through there you find him expanding on these points. When you go to Romans chapter 5 and verse 8 you'll find the same sort of emphasis.

Paul is dealing there with how unlikely it is that you would find any human being giving their lives in the place of someone who was a criminal a bad person.

Well he would say yes maybe for someone who is really good somebody who is a thoroughly good person one might dare to die.

you might just occasionally get that sort of thing. But God there is the same contrast again. On our terms in human terms you would very very seldom find somebody dying even for a good man.

You would hardly ever find it dying for a bad man. Somebody who is accused of the most heinous crime regarding let's say children or the murder of a child or whatever was brought before you and the judge said to you now I want you to do something for this person this person needs your help and what I want you to do is give your life for his or take his penalty instead of him having to pay it so that he can go free and be regarded as an innocent free person righteous person I want you to actually take his place and carry everything by way of what he deserved instead of him.

[9 : 42] Would you say okay I'll do that? Of course you wouldn't neither would I for that sort of person definitely not but God shows or demonstrates his own love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us that's Romans 5.8 that's the contrast where God himself is brought as the ultimate expression of love love the great love with which he loved us and of course it reminds us too that love every love every expression of love even in terms of human love there is a certain costliness to it because in love we are not just giving things to others yes you can express your love by an engagement ring by a wedding ring you can express your love by a valentine card or a box of chocolates or a bunch of flowers and there's nothing wrong with all of that you can express your love by giving things but you express your love particularly by giving yourself when you come to

love a person deeply what you're doing is giving yourself to them you're giving your very person to them you're giving yourself to them and that's one of the great things that the bible mentions about marriage between a man and a woman which is the only marriage the bible recognizes that's the great thing that Paul is saying based on Genesis that these two become one flesh in their love for each other what is it that happens they give themselves to each other there's a mutual giving and in love if it is love on our part then we're going to be giving ourselves we're going to be giving of our time we're going to be giving of our patience we're going to be giving of our energy we're going to be giving of everything that we indeed can't give to whatever relationship the love is involved in that is something that gives of ourselves it's a selfless thing in many ways it's the opposite of selfishness and that is especially so in the love of God

God demonstrates his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us God gave his only begotten son as John puts it in that famous verse John 3:16 God so loved the world that he gave what did he give he gave himself he gave his son he gave his only begotten son that who ever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life for God love is a costly thing love is a giving of himself love is a giving of himself to us and that's why you find chapter 5 beginning as it does therefore be imitators of God use God as your pattern or example as children who have been loved having been loved by

God we should say now that I know his love and have experienced his love I'm in a position to love as I've been loved therefore he says walk in love as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God you see this powerful love in the giving of Christ by the father and by Christ himself giving himself it's a powerful love because it's in that person of Christ and in the work of Christ that sin and death were dealt with and overcome what you see in the cross of Christ is the power of God's love what you see in the resurrection of Christ is the power of God's love you trace all of these back to the love of God it's the working out of God's love it's God's love finding its expression finding its work but it also overcame our deadness it's a powerful love because having done this by the cross and by his resurrection it doesn't end there the powerful love of

God comes actively and in terms of your experience of it into your life you don't just associate the love of God with something that's out there in the cross of Christ separate from your own inner experience I hope every one of us here today knows this because some people think that's all you need to be a Christian that you know of Christ having died on the cross that you accept that that took place that you accept the truth of that that you accept that that was the love of God that did that and the resurrection of Christ that followed it that the love of God worked through to that resurrection and brought that about for you yes of course all of that's necessary and necessary for us to believe but the love of God is poured into the hearts of his people as Paul says in Romans and that's what the power of love is also shown and that's where you find this amazing statement the contrast here you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked or go ahead there to verse 5 when you were dead in our trespasses made us alive together with ties what is behind our regeneration our being made into a new creation what is behind the breaking of our tie with sin and with death and with lostness what is it that breaks the tie between us and the condemnation of

God what is it that shatters this bond that we have with sin and with death in our deadness what is it that really changes and think of what this is saying what is it that changes what is dead into what is vibrantly alive it's the working of God's love it's God's love through the Holy Spirit applying what Christ has done in a way that inwardly changes us and brings us to know himself and to know his love it's a powerful creative thing that's why it says in verse 10 we are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works what has done that it's a marvelous image there of God the skilled craftsman every single

[17:17] Christian is a crafted work of art it's the workmanship of God that you see in everybody who's been changed by the work of God's spirit brought to life in union with Christ come to be a Christian it doesn't matter how you describe it the Bible describes it in all of these ways what is it that lies behind it what has come to actually achieve this what lies what's the root of all this where's it all come from why are there people here today who are no longer dead in sin and under the power of death why is it that there are people here who when they die will go to be with Christ why is it there are people here who when the time of the resurrection comes will be raised to incorruptible immortality because of the great love was which he loved us as a product or these

things are products of this love isn't it amazing and I say to myself as much as anyone else isn't it amazing how little we really appreciate the love of

God given that it lies behind everything else that you benefit from in your life the great love with which he loved us do you know that love today for yourself have you come to personal appreciation of it by coming to Christ and receiving him as the one who in God's love has been provided for us as a redeemer that is really the essence isn't it of a saving experience of Christ to take him as God's great gift of love to be our redeemer it's a powerful love but secondly it's an adopting love if you go back to chapter one you can see there that the love of

God is mentioned there as well particularly there in verse five again there's a long sentence there beginning at verse three but if you come through to verse five there in love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ according to the purpose of his will obviously adoption is a great topic in itself and we're not going to do more than just mention it in relation to the love of God but you can see there that the love of God as an adopting love that it was always God's purpose to bring his people to be his children by adoption to adopt us to be his own family it's not something that began when Adam fell it's not something that began when we were sinners it's not something that really had a beginning at all in fact in the proper sense of it because it says in love he predestined us that's something that's eternal that's something that's in the mind of God from all eternity it's the love of God which doesn't have a beginning actually coming to regard his people with an objective with an aim with a purpose what is that aim what is that objective what has God's aim always been in his love for his people it's that he would adopt them and make them his family in love he predestined us unto with a view to adoption as his children and adoption of course really takes in so many benefits that we don't have time even to list them all particularly benefits that you have in terms of an inheritance that you're going to inherit it you come into the rights to it in this life when you become a Christian you enter into the actual possession of it when you leave this world and go to heaven that is your inheritance it's that city that has foundations whose builder and maker is

God it is that eternity that realm that kingdom that has no end in which Christ is the king and which we shall reign with him that is your inheritance to actually be with him forever more to be done with this world and to no longer have the things that this world has of its restrictions its pains its woes its anxieties its troubles its concerns its death its tears they're all gone God has an inheritance without any of these things and it's all because of the great love with which he loved us and of course that's in terms of its application this adopting love this love that adopts us and makes us as family it's applied to us it's something that is done as an act of God in our redemption we are received by virtue of

[22 : 48] God's great act of adopting us we received into the number of the children of God we received the spirit of God into our lives into our hearts it's one of the great things that goes along with being an adopted child of God that you come to have your adoption sealed if you think of adoption papers normally there's some way of stamping them or seeing them that verifies the fact that you have adopted this child or you are an adopted child having been adopted by certain parents whenever you come to adoption the papers with regard to the person being adopted and the people who are doing the adoption they're stamped they're actually verifying that this adoption is genuine that it's lasting that it's real and God is doing the same he seals he stamps our adoption by giving us his Holy Spirit the possession of the

Holy Spirit in your life is the stamp of God's adoption of you into his family you can see that in Galatians actually the previous epistle in chapter 4 where you find that Paul is saying there but when the fullness of the time had come chapter 4 verse 4 God sent forth his son born of a woman born under the law to redeem those who were under the law so that we might receive adoption as sons but it doesn't end there it says that because you are sons God has sent the spirit of his son into our hearts crying Abba Father see what it's saying there because God loved you he made you his sons because you are now his sons he sent the spirit of his son the Holy Spirit into your hearts and through that spirit that you are enabled to cry to

God to regard God to deal with God to speak to God as your father to have him as no less than your father who is in heaven God the adoption the adoption the great love with which he has loved us has led to our adoption our being made children of God the family of God and you notice here the words are in the plural form you plural were dead in which you once walked plural even when we were dead in our trespasses because of the great love with which he loved us they're all plural

terms why is that important it's important because as God's love adopts his people and makes them his family that puts an end or should put an end to individualism individualism is a bad word for Christians it's very rife in the world around you it's very much part of selfishness people live for themselves our natural inclination is to just put self first everything else has to come secondary to that and serve that that's our natural sinful inclination it's not a surprise that that's what characterizes the world as he calls it here the course of this world among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh carrying out the desires of the body and the mind that's the mindset of the world number one individualistic and that has crept into the church as well it's there to know all of us naturally and it comes sometimes to express itself even in Christians but love should put an end to individualism because you can't love entirely on your own you can love yourself but that's not very good love is an expression to others of what they mean to you and it means that love is the antithesis of being individualistic and for the church of God that's so important the church is a family the church is a people welded or molded or melded together by grace into relationships of love or into a family where love really has to have preeminence in all the things that characterize them and in all their activities and that means that our spiritual development as Christians this is one of the things that again is so important in our age where your individual development as a Christian is not to be seen in terms of an individual an individualistic development yes you have to look after yourself as a Christian you have to look after your own life as a Christian but where do you do that in what context do you do that in the context of the family in the context of receiving support from your brothers and sisters in Christ it's amazing how often or how seldom rather Paul and other Bible writers speak about the individual in terms of their spiritual development and growth when he talks about growth when he talks about development when he talks about us coming to reach maturity as Christians it's always in the context of doing it together it's always in the context of unity together it's always in the context of the family bound together in love as the fourth chapter here actually puts it we're all coming towards working towards the fullness of being in [28 : 56] Christ and of course what he says there is that from him the whole body joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped when each part is working properly makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love speaking the truth to one another we grow in every way up to him speaking the truth in love it's all about family it's all about oneness it's all about this great spiritual structure that God in his grace has built or is building as he brings people into his adopted family it's because of the great love with which he's loved us thirdly just very briefly in closing this love is not just a powerful love and an adopting love it's also a caring love the love of God is a caring love because for one thing you have free and full access to your father in many ways

God contrasts himself with our humanness one of the ways in which the contrast is made clear is in the failures of our humanness to be the kind of parents we should be whether it's fathers or mothers or even children or daughters or sons but we can all point to places where we failed and where we still fail in these regards but there is never ever a failure with the fatherhood of God you have free access to him at any time you dare not come near him you dare not come to be bold with him you dare not come to speak to him as a child speaks to a father until you've come to know him as a father until he's brought you into his family but this is the great thing once that has happened once you've come to know him once you are a Christian once you have a right relationship with God then you can fully explore and fully exercise that relationship in terms of a child to a father the element of being afraid of him has gone you respect him you fear him in terms of awe and respect but you're no longer afraid of him he's your father you have free access to him at any time

I remember once being in an airport with a pastor from Korea and we just happened to meet another colleague of my own in the ministry I don't need to say who he was but the three of us got into a conversation and the Korean pastor had a little boy with him and the little boy was so taken up with the airport he was looking around him and not really focused on who he was next to and he was kind of stepping about a wee bit looking around and then I noticed he reached up his hand to take the hand of his father but instead he took the hand of my colleague who was standing beside me and as soon as he put his hand in his my colleague took his hand of course and grasped his hand but there was something about that grasp that the little Korean boy immediately knew that's not my father so he immediately let go and looked up and then he sidled over and took his father's hand and grasped it warmly that was so instructive just looking at that the hand was a human hand the hand that grasped his hand when he put it up firstly was well meaning a loving hand but it wasn't his father's hand and he knew it and when he had his hand in his father's hand that made all

the difference because that's where his security was that's where the relationship between him and this adult as his father made all the difference that's how it is with God it doesn't matter who cares for you it doesn't matter who loves you it doesn't matter who gives you security and we should all make as much of that together as possible as the family of God there is only one hand whose grasp you recognize as the hand of your eternal father as the hand of God himself that's the one you really want to know throughout every stage of life and the benefit you have as a child of God is that you can put his hand your hand in his at any time because his hand is never absent from your life and along with that the caring love gives you not just full and free access but full attention from your father if you allow me to be personal it's very easy sometimes and I've known it down through the years when the children were younger not just

Alice but the older two as well and nowadays too with the grandchildren if I'm in the study and especially if I'm busy really locked into something that I'm working on whether it's a sermon or an article or some response to an important communication and the study door gets there's a knock at the door there's a child out there that's pleading for entrance or to go and play with them or go and do this with them it's difficult to say but it's so often the case that your mind comes to think why just now and sometimes you might even say well look give me half an hour I'll be with you or 15 minutes 10 minutes I'll finish this in 10 minutes then I'll be with you what is that saying to the child it's saying what I'm doing on the computer is more important than you isn't it you can go back to your computer you can go back to the sermon preparation important though it is but when you're when you're needed by a child that loves you you drop everything you say ok I'm here for you what do you want let's let's talk let's do whatever now we all feel in human terms in that respect as I've just said that's just a confession of personal feeling but we've all been there

I'm sure most of us have been there and if you haven't yet got children and will have in the future you'll be there as well but you're never like that with God have you ever heard God from the other side of his study door saying give me half a note and I'll be with you no have you ever heard God refusing to receive you anytime you've come to him with a problem on your mind with something that you want to express to him with a heart that's burdened about something that you want to give to him in detail because you can't tell anybody else about it have you ever heard God say not now my child come back later and I'll be ready for you then of course not you have his full attention and you know what you have his full attention not just while you're in this life but you'll have it forever because heaven is nothing less than having the full attention of God your father given to you without interruption and without end do you know this love this powerful love this adopting love this caring love because of the great love with which he loved us let's pray lord our god help us we pray to appreciate increasingly the love with which you have loved your people we know that there is nothing greater we know that there is nothing more comprehensive more powerful and more life changing than your love in action we thank you for that experience we pray that each of us will come to know it more and more operating in our lives bless us we pray this day sanctify your word to us and to our needs and forgive our sin for Jesus sake amen