

GOD'S GREAT LOVE  
Ephesians 2:1-7

Intro: Often when I am reading my Bible I am struck with a word or group of words. I am sure that this is one way that the Lord has of calling my attention to something which He wants me to pay particular attention to. That is what happened to me recently when I was reading Ephesians 2. I was particularly impressed with the words in verse 4: "his great love." This started me thinking again about the love of God.

A quick look at that verse indicated that Paul was speaking about God's love for us, for you and me as His children. And I found myself asking myself, "What is it about the love of God that makes it so great? And what did Paul mean by the word great?"

I took my Greek Lexicon and I found that the word Paul used for great is a word which speaks of the largeness of God's love, of the intensity and power of His love, and even of its continuance. I could see from this that the Apostle Paul was overwhelmed with the character of God's love which sets it apart forever from human love. Paul was talking about a love which was without beginning and without end. He was talking about a love which had to find expression, and which had to be satisfied, a love which would overcome all obstacles in order to claim for Himself those whom He loved. And it was a love which would stop at nothing to provide for His loved ones that which they really needed.

This epistle speaks of Christ's love for us (which is the same kind of love), and it speaks of the love we have for each other. Actually some form of the word love is used 19 times in the book, but the reference here, and one other, which I will mention before I am through tonight, and the two times we have the word here in verse 4 of chapter 2, are the only times the love of God for His people is emphasized.

How thankful we can be to know that the love of God is not only "great" as I have described it, but that He has actually exercised His love toward us. In Paul's words, "He loved us."

Tonight I want us to look more closely at this love of love God to see why, in particular, Paul called it "great."

The first thing that we can see in our text is:

I. GOD'S LOVE IS GREAT BECAUSE OF ~~WHEN~~ HE LOVED US.

I am referring to those words in verse 5, "Even when we were dead in sins."

It is not that God loved us because we started to love Him. It is not that God loved us because He saw something good in us which made Him love us. Neither one of those things was true of us. He loved us when we were in a state of alienation from Him, suffering the consequences of our sins, unconcerned about God, not even wanting to know Him, and utterly unable to respond in love to Him. We were "dead in sins."

Read the first three verses of this chapter and you will see an enlarged statement of what it means that we were "dead in sins." (Read Eph. 2:1-3.)

We were separated from God, and content to stay that way, when we suddenly were made aware that the love of God transcended all that was ugly and abominable in us. He did not wait for us to change. He loved us then.

How different this is from human love. We love those to whom we are attracted in some way. We love those who love us. But sometimes we have difficulty loving those who are the closest to us because of troubles we have with them. But this is not the love of God. He loved us when we were "dead in sins."

This surely speaks of the greatness of His love.

But there is a second evidence of the greatness of God's love in our text.

II. WE SEE THE GREATNESS OF GOD'S LOVE BECAUSE IT IS COUPLED WITH HIS MERCY AND HIS GRACE.

Notice how verse 2 begins: "But God, who is rich in mercy.." And then let your eye run down to the parenthesis in verse 5: "By grace ye are saved."

God's love and mercy and grace are all related to each other, but they are not the same. God's mercy has to do with our misery--and our misery is the result of our sin, but we don't know that as long as we are "dead in sins." God's grace has to do with our guilt. It was not until the Lord began to deal with us that we began to realize that we are sinners against God, and under divine judgment. People scoff at the idea that we are sinners, but this is what we are in God's sight, and it was God's love which caused Him to have mercy upon us, and to extend grace to us. We were totally deserving, just like everyone else, and yet the love of God was

great enough to meet our spiritual needs because it was joined together with His mercy and His grace.

But we are not through yet. There is more to be said about the greatness of God's love.

III. GOD'S LOVE IS GREAT BECAUSE HE HAS JOINED US TOGETHER WITH CHRIST.

Verse 6 speaks of the Cross, doesn't it? Romans 5:8 tells us that "God commendeth His love toward us, in that, **while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.**" The death of Christ is not mentioned here in verses 5 and 6, but it is clearly assumed that the Lord died for us when we read that we were "quicken...together with Christ." And that we were "raised up together [with Christ, understood], and made" to "sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus."

Just think: God put our sins upon His Son because that was our penalty. And so when He died, we died. When He was buried, we were buried. When He arose, we arose. And now that He is seated at the Father's right hand, God sees us with Him in the heavenlies. None of us can probably understand the full significance of this now, but we can know it and believe it, and it will help us to see why Paul described God's love for us as "great." It is amazing that God would place our sins upon His Son so that because of His death we might be forgiven, and have eternal life instead of eternal death. We didn't deserve it. We could never have earned it. But it is ours in Christ.

Isaiah said it as clearly as it can be said in Isa. 53:6.  
(Quote.)

Look at Eph. 1:7, 8. (Read.)

When we look at the Cross, and see Christ dying, and understand Who He is, and know those for whom He died, then we are beginning to understand what Paul called the love of God "great."

I will never be able to finish saying all that can be said about the greatness of God's love, but let me point out three more things before I complete my message tonight.

IV. THE GREATNESS OF GOD'S LOVE IS SEEN IN ITS BEGINNING.

Actually this is not the best way to say it because as far as God is concerned His love for us had no beginning. But I will describe it like Paul described it.

Please look at Eph. 1:3-5. Here we have the other reference to God's love for us which I mentioned earlier. You will see it at the end of verse 4, but many students of the Word believe that "in love" belongs with verse 5. Either way it tells us the same thing.

God set His love upon us "before the foundation of the world," and determined at that time that He would not only save us, but that He would bring us into His family with the full rights and privileges of sonship.

The best way we can understand this is by saying that you can't find a time when God did not love us. He loved us before we were born. He loved us knowing how we would sin, and dishonor Him. He loved us even though He knew that we would not love Him until He made His love known to us. How can any love be more amazing than this. Surely it deserves the description, "great." God knew all of those terrible things about us, and yet He loved us, has always loved us. It is like God said through Jeremiah to His people in Israel, the words recorded in Jer. 31:3,

The Lord hath appeared of old unto me, saying,  
Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love:  
therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee.

Now if God's love for us is everlasting, then we should not be surprised to see how long it is going to last. And this brings me to my next point.

V. THE GREATNESS OF GOD'S LOVE IS SEEN BY WHAT IS GOING TO BE HAPPENING IN ETERNITY.

And now I will take you back to our text. Look with me at verse 7 of chapter 2. (Read.)

This verse tells us two wonderful things, at least two wonderful things, about the greatness of God's love.

- A. It tell us that God is never going to stop loving us.

God started loving us in eternity past, and He is still going to be loving us throughout eternity. He loves us this very moment like He has always loved us, and that love will never change.

The second thing that this verse tells us is this:

- B. Stating it as simply as I can, the best is yet to come.

You and I would not change places with any person who does not know the Lord. Even though we have our trials and testings here, we still would not give up the Lord for anything or anybody. Isn't that right? Of course it is.

But, you know, we haven't even started to realize how "great" the love of God is, and God is going to take all eternity to show us the greatness of His love. We know the riches of His mercy and His grace now; but when we get to heaven we will learn about "the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus." Then we will understand the Cross in a way that we cannot understand it now. Then we will understand what it means to be a child of God as we cannot understand it now. Ephesians 2:7 fully justifies our being able to say, "The best is yet to come!" Truly the love of God is great, far greater than you and I know, and so far greater than we can express.

Let me make one more point, and then I am through. This is an obvious point, but I need to remind myself of this, and I want to send you away with this tonight.

VI. THE GREATNESS OF GOD'S LOVE IS SEEN IN THE FACT THAT IT IS GOD'S LOVE.

I have been speaking about the love of God all evening, but let me conclude by pointing out that we have been talking and thinking about GOD! God, the Creator of the heavens and the earth. God, Who sets up kings and puts down kings. God, Who is working all things out according to His will. We have been talking about the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the everlasting God. He is, as we learned this morning, the only wise God, the embodiment of wisdom, and the source of all wisdom. This is the great God Who has demonstrated the greatness of His love by sending His precious and beloved Son to die for unworthy sinners such as you and I are.

Remember this is God's love. Think about it until that fact grips your heart. And then, in times when we are tempted to doubt God's love, let us remember what Paul told us here, directed by the Holy Spirit, and our hearts will quickly be at peace again.

Concl: Paul was not exaggerating at all when He called God's love "great." It is great in its depth, in its length, in its width, and in its height. And the more we know of God's love, and of Christ's love (which is exactly the same), the more we will "be filled with all the fulness of God," as Paul prayed at the end of chapter 3.

I really don't know any of your hearts, but God does, and surely you do. Perhaps you have felt God dealing with you tonight as we have looked at His great love, and you know that the Lord is calling you to Himself. He is awakening you out of spiritual sleep and death to bring you to life, eternal life, through the Lord Jesus Christ. Open your heart to Him. Confess Him as your Savior. Forsake everything else, and follow Him. It may amaze you tonight to think that God loves you, and it should, but I can assure you that the longer you know Him, the more amazed you will be.