

**Sermons**  
**All the World's a Stage**  
**Ephesians 2:7**  
**December 30, 2012**  
*Tom Pennington, Pastor-Teacher*  
*Countryside Bible Church, Southlake, Texas*

Our culture is defined and shaped by ancient ideas. There's nothing new under the sun, and so the thinking of our age is permeated by, shaped by, defined by the past. No ancient idea more shapes our world than that of the Greek philosopher, Protagoras. Protagoras was the father of agnosticism; as far as we know the first one to say, "There is no God, or gods, or at least we can't be sure." And out of that, he also became the father of moral relativism: if there is no God then there is no absolute standard, and so the standard changes relative to the thinking of the people. We see that in the constant polls about what should and shouldn't be done on the moral issues of our times. Protagoras' most famous line is this: "Man is the measure of all things." Man is the measure of all things. Man measures the rightness or wrongness of everything since there is no God or we can't know that there's one. In fact, boiled down to its most basic sense, he was saying man is the center of the universe. It was the ultimate statement of human autonomy. Even the Athenians, where he lived, even the Athenians, who were used to new and novel ideas and enjoyed them, even they recognized the bankruptcy of Protagoras' concepts. And they threw him out of Athens and burned all of his works.

Sadly, the ideas that Protagoras promoted are, frankly, very much alive and well in the twenty-first century. You see, the stepchild of his thinking is what we today call *humanism*. Secular humanism continues to assure us that man is the measure, that man is the center of the universe. In fact, you could put it in these terms: the end of all existence is the happiness of man, both individually and corporately. In everyday language, it really is all about me.

Now there is a reason that that concept resonates so deeply in the human heart, in all of our hearts. It's because it's part of the fallen human condition to think that the world, even the universe itself, revolves around us.

We think the universe exists for our happiness. It exists for us. That's in absolute contradiction to the clear statements of the New Testament. In Colossians 1:16, the Apostle Paul writes, for in Christ all things were created; they were created by Him and—what? “For Him.” Everything that exists, exists for Jesus Christ. You exist for Jesus Christ. But we get this skewed perspective. And even as Christians we can begin to think with the taint of humanism. We begin to think that God's chief end in the world is meeting our needs and caring for us and making us happy. There are so many Christians who treat God like a genie in a bottle. You know, He's great to have there and to have around on the shelf and use Him when you need Him; if you get into problems, you have trouble, you need something, you just rub the bottle and out pops God, and you tell Him what you need, and He delivers; and then you put Him away again and continue to do whatever you want. We can even begin to think that the reason God saved us was primarily for our benefit. Now, we do benefit, but that's not the primary reason God saved us.

Look at Ephesians 1. In Ephesians 1, beginning in Verse 3, Paul unfolds the spiritual blessings that are ours because of what Christ has done. He begins with sovereign election in Verse 4. He comes to adoption in Verse 5; in Verse 7 to redemption and forgiveness through the sacrifice of Jesus; this great sweeping eternal plan of God in Verses 9 and 10. And then He comes to the work of the Spirit in Verses 13 and 14. Why did God do all of that? Why did God put this plan of salvation in place for you, to redeem you? Well, let me show you. Three times in this chapter Paul makes it very clear. Verse 6, He did all of this “to the praise of the glory of His grace.” Verse 12, “To the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory.” Verse 14, the Spirit's been “given as a pledge of our inheritance - to the praise of His glory.” Paul couldn't make it any clearer. The eternal plan of redemption is not all about us, it's all about God.

When we come to Chapter 2, Paul returns to that theme and develops it even more profoundly and deeply. What we will consider this morning is, frankly, mind-bending, life-altering in its implications and its application. I want us to look at Ephesians 2, and we're going to be looking at the paragraph that begins in Verse 1 and runs down through Verse 10. Here Paul describes how God rescued us individually. It was a rescue, a spiritual rescue that was entirely God's work from beginning to end. It was, to use the words of theologians, “sola gratia” - by grace alone. We

didn't contribute effort or merit.

Now as Paul develops this dramatic change that has occurred to us in Verses 1 to 10, he does so in three simple movements. When we studied this (now five years ago) I laid this out for you but let me just remind you. Three movements through Verses 1 through 10 here in Ephesians 2.

The first movement is in verses 1 through 3. It's what we were. What we were when God found us. We were spiritually dead in our trespasses and sins. We were enslaved to our lusts, our flesh, to the world's system that Satan had put in place, and to Satan himself. The end of Verse 3, we were the objects of God's eternal wrath. That's what we were.

In Verses 4 through 6, Paul moves on to describe what God did. And He encapsulates it in three verbs: verse 5, He "made us alive"; Verse 6, He "raised us up"; Verse 6, He "seated us with (Christ) in the heavenly places." Those three verbs describe what theologians call regeneration. It is that moment-in-time, radical, new birth; that change that happens where we are given new desires and new longings and new hatred for sin and the things that displease God; a radical change in our being. This is what God did in regeneration, in salvation.

The third movement in this paragraph is found in Verse 7 through 10. Let's call it why God did it, because here he gets to the reason. In fact, Verses 1 through 10 here in Ephesians 2 are one sentence in the Greek text. Our English translations have broken it up to give us a little more of an English feel, but in the Greek language it's one sentence from Verse 1 to Verse 10. The subject of the sentence doesn't come till Verse 4: the word "God." That's the subject. And then there are those three verbs in Verses 5 through 6: He made us alive, He raised us up, and He seated us. God took the initiative. In spite of what we were and the condition in which we found ourselves, and He made us alive. He gave us new life. He regenerated us.

Verses 7 through 10 are still part of the same Greek sentence; in fact, they are a dependent clause, a purpose clause. Notice, it begins with a Greek word that's here translated "so that." It means "in order that." Paul is explaining the purpose of God in regenerating us. So, let's read this verse together. Verses 7 through 10. Here is why God saved you, and why He saved me.

So that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace, you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.

You see, God has always had a plan, and behind God's plan there are specific reasons. And here in these verses God tells us exactly what His reasons were for saving us, why He acted to save us. And here's the shocking thing. God's reasons for saving you are not primarily about you. Now don't misunderstand. God has truly set His love upon you personally and individually. He knows you by name. He considers you, and you are, one of His adopted children, if you're in Christ. But when the Apostle wants to explain what lay behind God's plan, he wants us to understand that it's much bigger than you or me. There were cosmic reasons God acted. Reasons hard for us to even grasp. And here in Ephesians 2, Paul identifies three reasons that God acted in sovereign grace to rescue us.

Now, let me give you the last two, and then we'll go back and look at the first in more detail. Here are the three reasons God acted in sovereign grace to save you. Reason number two: to destroy all human boasting. Those famous verses, Verses 8 and 9, that's what they're about. They're part of this one long sentence. Here's why God saved you by grace alone. It's so that He would absolutely demolish any opportunity for human boasting. It's true in who He choose. First 1 Corinthians 1, He chose the weak, the despised, the ignoble. It's also true in how He did it. He did it by grace. So that one day when you stand before God and you stand perfect in Christ, you won't have one shred of anything to boast about except Jesus Christ. He did it to demolish all human boasting, Verses 8 and 9. That's why it's, by grace through faith.

The third of reason, again we'll go back to number one, but the third reason God acted in sovereign grace to rescue you was, Verse 10, to guarantee good works. Notice Verse 10: "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works." And oh, by the way, these weren't an afterthought. These works are those "which God prepared beforehand so that we (should)

walk in them.” You see, God saved you so that you would become a little Jesus. Not in sense of everything that He is in His whole person. He's God and man. But so that you would resemble Him in your moral character. That's why God saved you, because He wanted a redeemed humanity that would forever spend eternity praising their Savior and reflecting His character.

Now, this morning I want us to go back and look at the first of the reasons God acted in sovereign grace to rescue us. And I want us to look at this first one, because it is the greatest and the grandest reason of all. God acted to rescue sinners, and in the way He acted to rescue sinners, by His own initiative, by His own grace alone. Verse 7, for this reason, to display His glory. To display His glory.

William Shakespeare, when I was in college, I had a full semester studying the plays of William Shakespeare and sonnets. And I still enjoy reading and thinking about the beautiful turn of phrase he uses. And in his play, *As You Like It*, Shakespeare wrote these words: “All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players. They have their exits and their entrances, and one man in his time plays many parts.” You know, it's interesting. Shakespeare was right. He was right in ways that he could not have imagined, and that he never intended. The world is a stage. This planet that we call home, this pale blue dot in the Milky Way Galaxy hurling through the blackness of endless space, it is a stage. It's the greatest stage in the universe, because it's the stage on which the eternal God is putting Himself on display.

Look again at Verse 7. Here's the first reason God saved you: “So that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.” Notice the Greek word translated “show.” That word means “to display, to give proof, to demonstrate something either by arguments or by actions, to put something on display.” That's the idea here. God is engaged in a grand demonstration or exhibition on a cosmic, universal, eternal scale. And He's doing it right here on this planet that we call home. Francis Fulks writes, “The purpose of God for His Church reaches beyond itself, beyond the salvation of individuals. The Church is to be the exhibition to the whole creation of the wisdom and love and grace of God in Christ.” William Hendriksen puts it this way: “God's purpose in saving His people reaches beyond man. His own glory is His chief aim.”

Now in this profound verse, there are several important questions that Paul answers about this grand exhibition or demonstration. I want us to consider those questions and his answers. The first question that he answers is this: when is this exhibition? When? Well notice how he begins Verse 7: “So that in the ages to come He might show.” It's in the ages to come. Now there are three possibilities of what Paul means there. He may mean that the ages of human history from the time of Jesus' first coming to the time of His Second Coming. In other words, the Church Age, as it's often called. And certainly, God is putting Himself on display in this period of time we call the Church Age. Look at Chapter 3, Verse 10. Paul talks about his own the stewardship of his own ministry: “So that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church.” Right now, during this period of time, God is putting Himself on display in the Church—and in this church. There's another possibility though, and that's that Paul means (in this expression) the future ages of eternity, beginning with the Second Coming of Jesus Christ and extending into eternity. And again, God is going to put Himself on display in that period of time as well. You can see back in Chapter 1, Verse 21, he talks about the age that is to come after this Church Age.

But I think the third possibility is the most likely, and it combines the first two. In other words, it includes all of human history, and at the same time includes all of eternity, because the expression Paul uses literally is in the present tense in the Greek text. We could translate it like this: “the ages, the ones coming and coming and coming.” It's really a powerful word picture. It pictures the time in which God is putting Himself on display as a shoreline onto which breaks wave after wave. But the individual waves don't represent days or years or even decades. The waves represent ages. You've gone to the ocean as I have, and you've stood there and looked out toward the horizon, and you see one wave after another and as far as you can see there're more waves coming. Paul says, imagine that you're standing from one spot in the perspective of time and eternity, and you see those waves. And those waves don't represent individual years, but they represent ages. And an age comes and goes. Another age comes and goes. Yet a third and relentlessly, age after age. That's when God is putting Himself on display.

It started in Eden after the fall. God put Himself on display through all the Old Testament, as He

chose one man through whom to bring the Messiah and a nation, He would raise up to put Himself on display. Of course, He put Himself most grandly on display in Jesus Christ our Lord and at the cross when Paul says in Romans 3, He publicly displayed Him as a propitiation for our sins. The display has continued ever since. It's going on right now. And it will continue through all of human history and into the ages of the ages. F.F. Bruce writes, "In the limitless future as age succeeds age, the crowning display of God's grace will ever be His kindness to His redeemed people. Throughout time and in eternity, the Church, (and I love this) this society of pardoned rebels, is designed by God to be the masterpiece of His goodness." When? Through all of human history and through all of eternity.

The second question that Paul answers is what does God display? When is through all human history and into eternity, but what exactly is the demonstration intended to show about God? Notice Verse 7 again: "That He might show the surpassing riches of His grace."

You know, it is the bane of human existence that those things that become the most familiar, become the most transparent. We don't see them. We're not aware of them. If I were to quiz you about some of the things that surround you in your home or in your office, you wouldn't even be able to tell me specific details. Because you see them all the time, they become commonplace. Sadly, the same thing is true for us as Christians, even with the issue of grace. Let me encourage you to think back to shortly after you became a Christian. You remember how excited you were about the concept of grace? Listen, we should be growing deeper in our understanding of grace. And we should be more excited about it today than we ever have been, because grace not only found us in salvation, we live in grace. Everything we have is grace.

What is grace? The most common Christian definition of grace is what? Unmerited favor. In other words, you get goodness from God. God treats you with goodness that you didn't merit. Now, that's true as far as it goes. The problem is, it doesn't go entirely far enough, because that's not grace; because that could imply that you contributed some, just not enough, and you needed God to make up the difference. That's not grace. Listen to A.W. Pink's definition of grace: "It is the favor of God, the goodness of God, to those who not only have no positive desserts of their own, but also who are thoroughly ill deserving and hell deserving." A.W. Tozer defines it this

way: "It is God's goodness directed toward human debt and demerit. It is by His grace that God imputes merit where none previously existed and declares no debt where there had been one before." What do those definitions have in common? It's not merely God's favor or goodness that we don't merit or earn, but exactly the opposite is true. It is God's goodness when we have earned or merit exactly the opposite. This is the character of God. I love the fact that when Moses says, God, tell me what You're like, proclaim Your name to me, back in Exodus 34:6, what does God say? He proclaimed His name and said, "The Lord, the Lord God, compassionate and" - what? "Gracious." I am full, Moses, of this quality, of grace. In 1 Peter 5:10, Peter calls our God, "the God of all grace." You won't find grace anywhere else. In Hebrews 10:29, the Spirit is called "the Spirit of grace." You see, God the Father is the fountain of the grace we enjoy; God the Son is the channel through which that grace reaches us; and the Spirit is the one who bestows it on us personally, who applies it to us.

Before our salvation, before the moment of regeneration, we all had the same standing before God, and it wasn't a good one. Paul says, there is no distinction, we were all exactly alike, "For (because) all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." That's where we all were. But now, Paul says in Romans 5, we stand in grace. It's the position we're in. It's the atmosphere we live in. It's the very air we breathe. We live in a kingdom where, Paul says in Romans 5:21, grace rules. This means that God constantly overwhelms us with goodness that we don't deserve, and not only that we don't deserve, but goodness that instead of deserving, we deserve exactly the opposite of. And oh, by the way, God's not stingy with this. You know, I think sometimes Christians have the idea that, you know, God is a God of grace, yes, but He sort of very carefully and grudgingly issues it. "OK, here's a little grace; you really don't deserve this, but I'm going to give you a little." No, He lavishes grace. He's full of grace. He delights in doing good to those who deserve exactly the opposite. That's who God is. He not only accepts us, He delights to accept us, even though we have earned and deserve exactly the opposite of that acceptance.

Now notice Ephesians 2:7. Paul says it's not just God's grace that's on display, but the "riches" or the wealth of His grace. And it's not just the wealth of His grace, but it's the "surpassing" wealth of His grace. The Greek word translated "surpassing" literally means "to throw over or beyond." The Greek word is *hyperballo*. It's the word from which we get our English word *hyperbole*.



Used figuratively it expresses the highest or the ultimate degree. He's talking about something that is beyond measure, beyond comparison, beyond comprehension. It is huperballo. It is beyond. This word, by the way, "surpassing", the Greek word, is only used a few times in the New Testament. But I love where it occurs, because we're told, for example, in Ephesians 1:19 that God's power is huperballo. It's surpassing. In Ephesians 3:19 we're told that Christ's love is huperballo. It's surpassing. And here in Chapter 2, Verse 7, we're told that God's grace is surpassing, the riches of His grace, surpassing. You know what Paul is saying? He's saying the wealth of God's grace can't be compared to anything else. There's nothing else like it in the universe. It can't be measured. It can't even be fully comprehended by our finite minds. God has put the immeasurable, incomprehensible, incomparable wealth of His grace on display.

So, Paul has told us when: throughout time and eternity. He's told us what the surpassing wealth of the goodness of God to those who deserve exactly the opposite. But that brings us to a third question. How does God display His grace? Notice again Verse 7: "So that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us." Here's how He displays or exhibits His grace. He does it by being kind to us. Now that is a remarkable statement, because just four verses before, at the end of Verse 3, we were said to be the objects of God's eternal wrath. But because of the change He's worked in regeneration, now just four short verses later we are the objects instead of His eternal kindness.

Now, the word "kindness" is an acceptable translation, but the Greek word is a more complex word than that. When the New Testament uses this word "kindness" to refer to things, it means "mild and pleasant as opposed to harsh, sharp, or bitter." For example, in Luke 5:39, Luke uses this word to refer to wine that has mellowed with age: it's lost its sharpness. In Matthew 11:30, Jesus says that "My yoke is easy." It's this word. My yoke is kind, it's not harsh, it's not hard. When this word is used of people, it means, as it is here, of course of God - it means "kind as opposed to harsh or severe." In fact, in Romans 11:22, Paul contrasts this word "kindness" with its opposite, and it's the word "severity." Kindness is tender love in action.

So, what is Paul saying here? He's saying that God displays His grace by not treating those who deserve His wrath with the harshness or severity that their sins deserve, but instead, by treating

them with the opposite of harshness and severity: kindness, tender love, in action. Now, God is kind to lots of different people. The Scriptures tell us that God demonstrated His kindness for all men to see by sending Christ into the world. Titus 3:4 refers to the coming of Christ as “when the kindness of God our Savior appeared.” God is even kind to unrepentant sinners, who will never come to the knowledge of the Truth, because in Romans 2:4, he says, don't you know that the kindness of God is intended to lead you to repentance? But by refusing that, he says, you're storing up God's wrath.

But God especially shows His kindness to those sinners whom He has chosen and on whom He has set His love. Listen to Romans 11:22. Paul is, of course, in that section of Romans when he's talking about the election versus those who are not elect. He's talking about the Jews who have been cut off so that the Gentiles can be grafted in. Listen to what he says in Romans 11:22, “Behold then the kindness and severity of God.” Here you can see both of these attributes of God in one verse. “Behold... the kindness and severity of God; to those who fell (to those who were not chosen, who were cut off) severity (God's harshness, His wrath), but to you, God's kindness.” So, this quality in God called kindness is not only something God showed us when we were sinners, it's not only what God showed in saving us, but here in Verse 7, it's how God plans to treat us throughout eternity. Look at it again. “So that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace” by being kind to us. For eternity God plans to treat us with kindness as opposed to the harshness and severity we deserve and that others get.

Now how can a Holy God be so generous with those who have accumulated so much guilt? On what basis can He show us this kindness? The key comes at the end of Verse 7: “in Christ Jesus.” I think sometimes when we read that expression, we think of it as almost a throwaway statement. Nothing could be more important to your position and future than that little phrase “in Christ Jesus.” Every kindness God shows sinners was purchased at the cross by Christ, and it comes in and through Jesus Christ. The reason I am accepted today is because I am in Christ. The reason I will be accepted by the Father the rest of my life here on this earth is because I'm in Christ. You understand that. But you know, it's easy to begin to think that things might change once we get into eternity: you know, once I'm there, and once I'm thoroughly forgiven, and once I've been made perfect with the moral character of Jesus Christ, maybe from that point on I deserve just a

little bit to be there. Nothing could be farther from the truth. That is a lie from hell itself. From the moment I come to Christ, throughout this life, and until the endless ages sweep across eternity like the waves of the sea, the only reason I will ever be accepted before God is that I am in Christ.

Now what does that mean? It means two things. We studied this when we studied Ephesians. It means that I am in Christ in the sense that He is my representative. Everything Christ does, I get credit for. He lived the perfect life. God gives me credit for that. He imputes that righteous life to me. He died for sins. God gives me credit for that death as though I had died for what my sins deserved. I am in Christ in the sense that He is my representative. I get credit for everything He does. There's another sense of that expression. Not only am I in Christ in the sense that He's my representative, but I am in Christ in the sense that, as He describes it in John 15, He is the vine and I'm like a branch. Spiritually, He is like the vine through which eternal life continues to flow into my human soul. It's as if I were linked up to Him in some way with some sort of spiritual umbilical cord through which all the spiritual life and nourishment, I need flows to me. If it were possible for that relationship with Christ to be severed and thank God, it is not possible. But if it were possible, even if I had lived in perfection for ten thousand years, at the moment that relationship is severed I would be immediately and eternally lost and worthy of the eternal wrath of God. The fact that God continues throughout eternity to show kindness to us is not because we will ever deserve it, but because Christ deserves it, and we're connected to Him. We are "in Christ."

Listen, God's grace is incomparable. It's incomprehensible. It's immeasurable. And by treating us with kindness for eternity, God puts the riches, the surpassing wealth of His grace on display in us. William Hendriksen writes, "Throughout eternity, the redeemed will be exhibited as the monuments of the marvelous grace of our loving Lord, who drew us from destruction's pit and raised us to the heights of heaven and did all this at such a cost to Himself that He spared not His Son."

Now that brings us to a fourth and final question. And this question is raised by the text but is not answered in this text. And that is, who is the audience of this exhibition? When there's an

exhibition, when there is a display, it's intended for somebody to see it. So, for whom is this display? Well, when you look at the Scripture, there are four answers given. Very briefly. Here's whom this display is for.

Number one, it's for all humanity. God rescues sinners to put His glory on display to all the rest of mankind. You see this whenever God redeems. Go back to Exodus 9. The greatest human example of redemption in the Old Testament (that is, of God redeeming a people) was when He redeemed His people from Egypt. And look at what God says in Exodus 9, Verse 13:

The Lord said to Moses, 'Rise up early in the morning... stand before Pharaoh and say to him, 'Thus says (Yahweh), the God of the Hebrews, "Let My people go, that they may serve Me. For this time, I will send all My plagues on you and your servants and you people, so that you (will) know that there is no one like Me in all the earth.'" (Now, watch verse 15. I love this) For if by now I had put forth My hand and stuck you and your people with pestilence, you would have been cut off from the earth."

God's saying, "Listen"—He's not saying He's playing with them, but you could almost say it that way. "Look, I've just been messing around with you at this point, because I have a lesson, I want you to get." God says, "Listen, there wouldn't be plagues two, three, four, five, six through ten. If I had wanted to destroy you, the first plague would have been enough. But here was my purpose." Verse 16: "But, indeed, for this reason I have allowed you to remain, in order to show you (Pharaoh) My power and (watch this) in order to proclaim My name throughout all the earth." God says, "I'm going to redeem My people, because I want all of humanity to know that I am a saving, redeeming God." And that's what God is doing in the display of His grace on us. It's for all humanity. Read Psalm 67. All seven verses of that little Psalm are about the fact that God saves in order to display His name to all mankind around this planet.

There's a second part of the audience though, not only all of humanity, but secondly, all of redeemed humanity. Listen to 2 Thessalonians 1:10. Paul's talking about the Second Coming, and he says, "When He comes, He will come. (Listen to this expression) to be marveled at among all

who have believed.” Redeemed humanity, we as Christians, are part of the audience for whom this display is intended. God wants those whom He has saved to be awestruck by His greatness, by His power, by His majesty, by His grace. When Jesus comes, it will be marveled at by all who have believed. He intends for us to see what He's done and just shake our heads in wonder and amazement.

There's a third audience, and it's a surprising one, one we don't think about very often. But on a number of occasions the Bible says God does what He does for this audience. It's for the angels. Look at Ephesians 3. Paul talks about the ministry he's been given, the ministry of the gospel Verse 8, “To preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ,” to preach a mystery, the mystery of the Church which was hidden and now been revealed. Why? Verse 10, “So that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the Church.” Made known to whom? Why is God doing this? “To the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places.” These are angelic beings. There is an audience to the redemption that's unfolding on our planet earth. And it's not just humanity, and it's not just Christians. The audience is millions of powerful, intelligent beings that we call angels. They're watching the mystery of redemption unfold.

There's a fourth member of the audience, and this is the most important audience of all. It is the eternal Son of God. You see, in eternity past God made His Son a promise. And what's happening on this planet is the unfolding of that promise. You get a glimpse of it in Titus 1. In Titus 1:1&2, Paul talks about the promise God made to give eternal life in long ages past. He's talking about eternity past. We weren't there, so who was God making a promise to in eternity past? The answer is to His Son. You see other glimpses of it in places like John 6, where Jesus describes those who believe as those whom the Father has given to Me. You see, what happened in eternity past is the Father made a promise to His Son. He promised Him a redeemed humanity, who would forever praise Him and worship Him and serve Him. A bride. And what is unfolding on this planet is an expression of the eternal love of the Father for the Son. Do you understand that you were part of a promise God made His Son in eternity past? You understand that you are in reality a love gift from the Father to the Son? He's part of the audience that's watching this grand demonstration. What a verse.

Now as we finish our time together, very briefly, what are the lessons we can learn? There are three lessons I'd like for you to contemplate from this verse we looked at this morning. The lesson number one is a lesson of humility. A lesson of humility. It's not about us. God is doing something much greater. You know, we live our lives, and we're tied up in our issues and our problems and our sins and our families and our work. You ever stop to think that right now, as you're dealing with those issues, there are seven billion people on this planet sharing exactly the same issues? Oh, and by the way, there have been thousands of years of human history, and we're just one generation in those thousands of years. I hate to tell you this, but those people that come before us, they never thought about us. And we don't think much about them unless we're sitting in a history class. And we really don't think about those yet to come. But if the Lord tarries, there will be hundreds or thousands of years more with the world filled with people just like us. And all of us will live and will die on a tiny, cosmic speck of dust hurling through space on the edge of a small galaxy twirling among millions and billions of other galaxies. The universe, my friends, is not about you, and it's not about me. God has a great, cosmic plan, and that eternal plan is to put His character on display before all of humanity, before all of redeemed humanity, before the angels, and ultimately before His Son. And for those who are His, by an act of His sovereign grace alone, He has made us a part of that plan. It's very humbling when you stop to think about it. Your Christian life does not begin and end with you. God does not exist to promote your happiness. You are only a small part of what God is doing. Yes, He loves you individually, personally, by name. You are His son or daughter. But He has other sons and daughters. And He has His unique Only Begotten Son for whom all of this is staged. I love the way Paul puts it in Acts 13:36. He's speaking of David. David, of course, one of the great figures in the Old Testament. But he says this: "David, when he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep." That's what we're here for, to serve the purpose of God in our own generation, because we are swept up in a huge plan that's much greater than we.

But there's a second lesson, and it's the lesson of assurance. A lesson of assurance. You know, we are new in Christ. We've been regenerated, but we still struggle a lot with sin, don't we? And it's easy when we look at ourselves and our failures to begin to doubt and to lose our confidence. And frankly, if my salvation were up to me, it would be right for me to have an ebb in my confidence, and to wonder if I'd ever really make it. But my salvation is so much bigger than me.

God chose me in eternity past to be part of this grand demonstration in which He is putting Himself on display. He decided that my salvation, my regeneration, would put the glory of His grace on display, now and into eternity. And if God were to fail to accomplish my ultimate salvation, then He would undermine that grand demonstration. Listen, I can rest in confidence and assurance, and so can you, that God, who began a good work in you, will be faithful to complete it till the day of Jesus Christ, because He is going to present you complete in Christ as a love gift to His Son. And even you can't get in the way of that.

There's a third lesson. It's a sense of privilege. A lesson in privilege. Think practically about what Paul is saying here in Verse 7. He's saying, in eternity, it's as if God will point to you and He'll say to the angels and to all the rest of the intelligent beings gathered, "Look at him, look at her, and see how great My grace really is." We will literally be trophies of His grace. Martin Lloyd Jones writes,

This to me is the most overwhelming thought that we can ever lay hold of, that the Almighty, everlasting, eternal God is vindicating Himself and His holy nature and being by something that He does in us and with us and through us. At the consummation God is going to open this great, last exhibition, and all these heavenly powers and principalities will be invited to attend. The curtain will draw back, and God will say, "Look at them"!

What a privilege.

If you've ever gone to art galleries, you know that often they will solicit collections of a famous painter and feature his work. We've had a number of those come and go through the art galleries here in the DFW area. And those exhibitions will feature the paintings of those painters carefully, with just the right lighting, in order to show the texture and the hue and the color and even the brush strokes. But the point of those exhibitions isn't each individual painting, it's the skill of the painter. And through God's spiritual rescue of us, we have become God's masterpieces. If you will, each of us is a portrait of grace. And God wants to display it for all the universe to see, to examine, to marvel at. But our salvation individually isn't the point, any more than an individual

painting in an art exhibition is the point. The point in this case is not only the skill of the artist, but His character as well - the incomparable, incomprehensible, immeasurable grace of God. Our salvation is not all about us. It's all about Him. You have been saved by grace alone. Listen carefully, so that every intelligent being in the universe will forever be amazed at God's grace to you. Let's pray together.

Father, seal these words to our hearts. We are overwhelmed by the thought of Your grace when we deserve the opposite from Your hand. Father, help us to put our lives, and even this coming year, in perspective. Thank You that You set Your love upon us. But Father, remind us that You are about something much greater than our personal whims and happiness. You are putting Your glory on display. You are assembling a bride for Your Son. You are putting together a gift of Your love to present to Your Son, who gave the greatest gift to us. We thank You, O God, in Jesus' name, Amen.