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Sermon Notes

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An Eternal Display of Grace

Ephesians 2:6-7

What will we be doing in heaven?? So many people ponder the heavenly life with a certain amount of questioning... perhaps even some apprehensiveness... maybe a hidden dread

They picture sitting on some fluffy cloud with a harp, singing the same songs over and over forever... it's hard not to wonder if we'll feel bored

“When we've been there ten thousand years, bright shining as the sun... we've **NO LESS DAYS TO SING GOD'S PRAISE** than when we've first begun”

To some people, that may seem scary... there is nothing we do here in this present age that we'd want to do for all eternity!
Honestly, would you want to eat your favorite food for 1000 consecutive days, never mind for 10,000 years! Could you see really enjoying pepperoni pizza every single day forever, even if you never got fat from it!

What are we going to fill the time with in heaven?

Randy Alcorn's book, *Heaven*: one of the most impactful books I've read in the last ten years... sought to root our speculations about heaven more solidly on biblical teaching

He went on for almost 500 pages, an extended and detailed meditation on many scriptures related to heaven... and made many speculations

Whatever we may think of what Alcorn does in the book *Heaven*, we must know that any dread we have of being bored there makes **NO SENSE AT ALL**... actually, heaven will be radiant with the glory of God, and God is the most fascinating being in the universe!! Think of the endless variety of life he's created here on earth! Think of how many species of tropical fish

there are, with their endless range of shimmering colors and the fascinating patterns on the sides of their bodies

Think of how many species of wildflowers there are growing in the Smoky Mountains of our beautiful state! Think of how many different birds there are... some designed by God to be stunningly beautiful, like the peacock; some designed to soar high on thermals, like the eagle; some designed to fly faster than any other living creature, like the Peregrine Falcon which can hit over 242 mph in a hunting dive; some designed to be quite ordinary, like a sparrow

Heaven will be an endlessly fascinating place!

But I think one of the best parts of heaven will be learning HOW GOD SHOWED GRACE to each Christian that ever lived! To STUDY CHURCH HISTORY and learn how God saved a man from Rwanda, a girl from Malaysia, a woman from the Andes in Peru, a witch doctor from the Congo, a genetic scientist from Germany, a Communist party member from China...

To hear their stories, for God's grace in their lives to be PUT ON DISPLAY

I believe that that is what is implied in the text we're studying this morning!!

I. Grace Displayed in the Past: WHAT GOD HAS ALREADY DONE IN US

A. Paul's Goal: To Understand GOD'S POWER at Work in our Lives

Ephesians 1:18-19 I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, ¹⁹ and his incomparably great power for us who believe.

He compares that power working in us to the power of God he exerted in raising Christ from the dead

B. Our Natural Beginning Place: Dead in Sin

Ephesians 2:1-3 As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, ² in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. ³ All of us also lived

among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.

C. “But God”: The Sovereign Power of God intervenes

Ephesians 2:4-6 But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ--by grace you have been saved--⁶ and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus

D. The Character of God in our Salvation

1. “being rich in mercy”
2. “because of the great love with which he loved us”
3. GREAT IN POWER!!!

E. Our Spiritual Resurrection in Christ

1. God raised us from the dead in Christ

F. Our Spiritual Ascension with Christ

1. God seated us in the heavenly realms in Christ

All this HAS ALREADY HAPPENED to everyone who is a Christian!!!

You just have to LOOK BACK at what you were apart from Christ and see it from the proper perspective!

G. God’s Purpose: To Put His Grace on Eternal Display

1. Again and Again: God’s Purpose Stated Plainly
2. “In order that...”: This is God’s Reason Why God Saved Us from Sin

Ephesians 2:6-7 And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, ⁷ in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace

3. We've seen it in chapter 1

Ephesians 1:4-6 In love ⁵ he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will-- ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace
to the praise of his glorious grace

Ephesians 1:12 in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory.

Ephesians 1:13-14 Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴ who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession-- to the praise of his glory.

H. A Public Display: "So He Might SHOW His Grace"

1. The "Glory of God" always implies a DISPLAY and a watching AUDIENCE of created beings who see the aspects of God's glory
2. The "Glory of God" then is the RADIANT DISPLAY of God's attributes
3. Many verses speak of this desire of God to PUT HIS NATURE and HIS WORKS ON DISPLAY

The display of God in creation:

Psalm 19:1-2 The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. ² Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge.

Aspects of the gospel:

The display of God's justice

Romans 3:25 God presented [Christ] as a propitiation, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished

The display of God's love

Romans 5:8 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

God's awesome work with Pharaoh:

Romans 9:17 For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.

Paul's conversion:

1 Timothy 1:16 But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life.

Paul's humble, apparently weak preaching of the gospel:

1 Corinthians 2:4-5 My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, ⁵ so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power.

Simple concept here: GOD SAVES US IN ORDER TO PUT US ON DISPLAY

Matthew 5:14-15 "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house.

In Matthew 5, the display is HERE AND NOW, in front of an audience of people who might see us and come to faith in Christ:

Matthew 5:16 In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

But in Ephesians 2:7, the display goes on in the future... and into eternity

I. An Immeasurable Display

1. "Incomparable Riches of Grace"

- a. Lavish language of how incredibly rich has been God's grace to us in Christ!!

- b. God wants us to know how much He spent on us in Christ
- i) Usually, when someone buys a loved one an expensive gift, they go to great lengths to remove the price tag
 - ii) Many retailers will give you a “gift receipt” so that the recipient doesn’t know how much you spent
 - iii) But God wants to show how much grace He’s lavished on us in the blood of Christ so that we will never UNDERVALUE the atonement that Christ worked for us
 - iv) So he wants to put on display the incomparable riches of His grace
 - v) It is possible for a multibillionaire to give a \$100 bill to a homeless person, and it is as nothing to him...
 - vi) But to save us from our sins, God had to give the very best, the most precious thing in all the universe... the blood of his Son, his only Son, his beloved Son

Romans 8:32 He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all-- how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?

Christ is worth more than ALL THINGS in the universe to God

So God wanted to PUT ON DISPLAY the IMMEASURABLE RICHES of His grace in Christ Jesus

To some degree, this is a paradox... he wants us to MEASURE the IMMEASURABLE!! To walk around the Mount Everest of his grace and get a sense of the magnitude of what He gave for us in Christ

2. “Expressed in His Kindness”

- a. We can imagine a stingy person giving some lavish gift and wanting us to feel guilty for how much he spent
- b. He wants us to feel a sense of INDEBTEDNESS, a sense of BONDAGE... it’s a power play

Proverbs 23:6-8 Do not eat the food of a stingy man, do not crave his delicacies; ⁷ for he is the kind of man who is always thinking about the cost. "Eat and drink," he says to you, but his heart is not with you. ⁸ You will vomit up the little you have eaten and will have wasted your compliments.

c. But God is NOT LIKE THAT!! The immeasurable riches of his grace are expressed in his KINDNESS to us in Christ Jesus!!!

Luke 12:32 "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."

Luke 15:22-24 "But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. ²³ Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. ²⁴ For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.'

Micah 7:18 Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy.

God is so KIND to us in Christ! He is gentle with us, speaking tenderly to us, wooing us from our sins, enticing us in the person of his Son, Jesus Christ

Matthew 11:28-30 "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

So God saved us in order to put the IMMEASURABLE RICHES of His grace to us ON DISPLAY...

J. An Eternal Display: "In the coming ages"

Ephesians 2:6-7 And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, ⁷ in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.

1. This is a stunning statement... God was looking AHEAD... to the COMING AGES
2. For those COMING AGES, he wanted to put his grace to us ON DISPLAY... so that it would never be forgotten!
3. What are “the coming ages?”
 - a. First, your own future life in Christ... he has YET MORE GRACE to show you

II. Grace Displayed for the Rest of Your Life

- A. Covering You with Grace... to Show You How Much Grace He is Giving You
- B. From Now Until the Day You Die... an Experience of God’s Saving Grace

James 4:6 But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."

- C. Facing Constant Attacks from the World, Flesh, Devil... God shows you more grace
 1. Every time the world allures, God shows you more grace to resist the temptation and fight its pull
 2. Every time Satan assaults you, God shows you more grace to stand firm in the assaults he is hurling at you
 3. Every time you yield to your flesh and sin, God shows you more grace... “expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus”

God said to Ananias about the now converted Saul of Tarsus:

Acts 9:16 “I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.”

But in a similar way... **“I will show him how much grace I will lavish on a sinner like him!”**

Hebrews 13:5 “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.”

- D. “Future Grace”

1. John Piper's insight: "Living by faith in future grace"
 - a. The Christian life is not best lived by looking back with gratitude to what God has already done, but rather by looking ahead by faith to grace that God will give us

Ephesians 2:7 in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.

2. The Christian life AS WE LOOK AHEAD is lived by faith that he will show us more and more grace as we need it
3. In the coming future of our lives, God will keep lavishing grace on us

III. Grace Displayed for Eternity... IN HEAVEN

Ephesians 1:20-21 ... [God] raised [Christ] from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, ²¹ far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.

- a. God wants for all the heavenly age to come to put you on display, to show others the grace he had in your life
 - b. The audience will be the ANGELS... but also, OTHER REDEEMED PEOPLE
2. Perhaps an amazing insight into heavenly occupation
 3. That God would continue to put on display each of the trophies of his grace and EDUCATE US on how He saved each one
 4. This would imply an endless EDUCATION in heaven, learning the specific details of how God brought this or that person to Christ
 - a. Isaiah 9:

Isaiah 9:6-7 For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of

Peace. ⁷ Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end.

- b. We will be forever LEARNING... LEARNING... learning about history, missions, and EACH INDIVIDUAL CHRISTIAN... each one a trophy of God's grace... the greatest display of the power and love of God in history

Job 1:8 "Have you considered my servant Job?"

We will have the time to CONSIDER God the Father's work in electing each of His children, and in orchestrating specific circumstances to bring each elect person to Christ... WHAT STORIES could be told!!

John 21:25 Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written.

We will hear the stories, each one... the behind the scenes activity of the Sovereign God in saving each person from every tribe, language, people, nation

- c. One of the most encouraging things we can do right now is to study the history of missions, how the gospel moved from the Upper Room in Jerusalem to Judea, Samaria, and then to the ends of the earth
- d. We know some of the famous stories... like how Augustine was saved when he heard a group of little children singing "Tolle, Lege, Tolle, Lege..." "Pick up and read, pick up and read"... and there was a scroll with Romans 13 on it, and it converted him to the grace of Christ
- e. How Celtic missionaries like Columba, burning with fiery zeal and based in Ireland, took the gospel across barbarian Europe;
- f. How Boniface chopped down the sacred oak in Thuringia, and a miraculous wind blew it down... and many Germans were saved

- g. How Thomas took the gospel to India... how the Nestorians took the gospel to China
 - h. How Martin Luther's eyes were opened when he read Romans 1:17... the "righteousness of God" and "the righteous will live by faith..."
 - i. How Moravian missionaries sold themselves voluntarily as slaves to reach slaves on the sugar plantations of the West Indies
 - j. How Adoniram Judson was converted when he happened to hear his atheist friend Jacob Eames from Brown University die in the next room at an inn one night... and how God then led Judson and his wife to Burma; and how he suffered when she died, and how he dug his own grave and waited for God to take him too... and how he was imprisoned for 21 months; and how God used Judson to lead 210,000 Burmese to Christ!!
5. In our times... amazing stories of the church growing in some of the hardest places on earth
- a. David Garrison, *A Wind in the House of Islam*... stories from around the Muslim world of how individual people are coming to Christ, and how there are more and more movements of large numbers believing in Christ and organizing themselves
 - b. The book is full of stories from North Africa, West Africa, Turkestan, Indo-Malaysia, and other parts of the Islamic world...
 - c. I zeroed in on the Arab world
 - i) Learned about a man named Abouna Zakaria Botros, a 79-year-old exiled Egyptian Coptic priest who infuriates Muslim fundamentalists with his satellite broadcast television program supplemented with Internet chat rooms...
 - ii) His ministry has been effective in leading THOUSANDS of Arab Muslims to turn away from Islam and place their faith in Jesus Christ

- iii) He is living in exile in the US, and by 2008, his 90 minute broadcast was reaching 60 million Arabs a day
 - iv) He preaches the gospel plainly... but also exposes what he calls the “ugly side of Islam”... lies and contradictions within Islam...
 - v) He says “My program is to attack Islam, not to attack Muslims, but to save them, because they are deceived. I love Muslims; I hate Islam.”
 - vi) As a result of his astonishing boldness, Zakaria has been called “Islamic Public Enemy No. 1” and there is a reported \$60 million bounty on his head
 - vii) A Christian in Egypt smirked that Muammar Khaddafi offered 60 million to any Muslim who could just ANSWER Zakaria!
- d. The book goes on to speak of person after person who have been converted by this man’s bold ministry
- i) A 64 year old Arab man named Nasr who had been wooed by the gospel all his life, but finally came to Christ when he pondered Zakaria’s attacks and did some research, and couldn’t refute what he was saying
 - ii) He gave his life to Christ and met an American missionary named Tim who had tried for years to win Muslims in that city without success; he got Nasr’s address and followed up with him; Tim disciplined Nasr, encouraged and trained him; Nasr started boldly leading others to Christ as well
 - iii) In the year that followed, Nasr had organized hundreds of groups of Muslims who, like him, were questioning Islam and were open to learning about Jesus
 - iv) One of them was a man named Sabri, 50 years old, influential in his village; he led his own wife and children quickly to Christ by showing them the falseness of Islam and the truth of Christ; he eventually worked his way through the town and is now responsible for leading 400 to

faith in Christ, dividing them into groups small enough to be managed and not attract attention from the State police

- v) Another person impacted by Nasr is a 21-year-old young woman named Amal, a college graduate, very bright, single when she came to Christ... she also searched out what Father Zakaria was saying about Islam's lies and Christianity's truths; Brother Nasr gave her an injil (New Testament) and she was reading it faithfully; she started having VISIONS OF LIGHT... she would pray and ask God to show her the truth... he showed her Jesus! She eventually trusted in him completely; she witnessed to other women despite the great danger if she were discovered... she hid her faith from her father and all her family; a year after becoming a Christian, her father arranged a marriage to a strong Muslim... within months, her Christian faith was discovered and she was beaten severely as they tried to find out those from whom she'd learned the Christian religion; Amal was sequestered from leaving the house and she has not been seen since.

6. How many stories are there to hear???????

Revelation 7:9-10 After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. ¹⁰ And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."

The heavenly question... it will have a heavenly answer!!!

Revelation 7:13-17 Then one of the elders asked me, "These in white robes-- who are they, and where did they come from?" ¹⁴ I answered, "Sir, you know." And he said, "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. ¹⁵ Therefore, "they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them. ¹⁶ Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. ¹⁷ For the Lamb at

the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

B. A Christ-Centered Display: "In Christ Jesus"

Ephesians 2:7 in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones:

It is so easy for us to forget that every spiritual blessing in the universe has come to us by the purchase of Christ's blood... we have NOTHING apart from Him! Paul NEVER FORGETS Christ!! He never forgets to mention that sweet name! Go through his epistles and you'll see how often he mentions the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. All blessings from God come to us and flow into us through Him. He is the head of the church which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all; We derive all our life, every blessing, every power, and our very sustenance from the fact that we are members of his body..."

C. So... for all eternity... we'll be studying HOW RICH was God's grace IN CHRIST to EACH AND EVERY ONE of that multitude from EVERY NATION on earth ... and Christ will become greater and greater in our sight as a result!!!

^{KJV} *Psalm 34:3 O magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together.*

D. At the Heavenly Assembly, When the TESTIMONIES Are Told... God Wants ALL the Glory!

E. "So that No One Can Boast"!!!

1 Corinthians 1:28-31 God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things-- and the things that are not-- to nullify the things that are, ²⁹ so that no one may boast before him. ³⁰ It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God-- that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. ³¹ Therefore, as it is written: "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord."

Romans 3:27-28 Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On that of observing the law? No, but on that of faith. 28 For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law.

When each of the people gets up to tell the story of their salvation, there will be PRAISE... there will be GLORY... there will be HONOR... there will be BOASTING... but it will all be directed to the Triune God

God the Father, who crafted the salvation plan, and elected us to be part of it and who sovereignly orchestrated details in our lives to bring us to faith

God the Son, who died in our place on the cross to save us from our sins... who worked a perfect redemption in his blood to save us from God's punishment

God the Holy Spirit, who applied the gospel to us... who took out the heart of stone and gave us the heart of flesh... who made Christ appear GLORIOUS to us!!

We will be BOASTING in the work of God in every case

Ephesians 2:7 in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.

IV. Applications

A. Christians: Meditate again on the richness of God's grace in saving you!

1. Many verses in Ephesians have given us that sense... our astounding WEALTH in Christ... the fact that we are heirs of the Kingdom whose riches are staggering to comprehend
2. Even more that we are rich in the sweetness of God's love toward us in Christ... richly loved, richly forgiven, richly accepted in Christ

3. Ponder with deep thankfulness the grace and kindness God displayed in saving you
- B. “In order that in the coming ages he might SHOW...”
1. Look forward to the heavenly displays of God’s grace to ALL Christians
 2. Anticipate what it’ll be like to celebrate the grace of God in other people’s lives
- C. Celebrate God’s Grace in OTHER PEOPLE’S LIVES... NOW!!!
1. C.J. Mahaney in his book *Humility* said we need to learn how to see God’s grace at work in other people and give thanks for it
 2. Learn how to tell people how you see God at work in their lives
 3. Have an attentive eye to the work he’s doing in sanctifying people from their sins
 4. Express to God IN PRAYER how thankful you are for the amazing display of grace you see in other people’s lives
- D. “Kindness”: God shows us immeasurable kindness in saving us in Christ
1. Learn how to display KINDNESS and GRACE to others
 2. Be a kind person... be a cheerful giver... don’t begrudge the time it takes to minister to someone or to serve someone
 3. People who are tempted to be STRONG in personality and a little HARSH... learn how to use a gentle tone, a pleasant demeanor
- E. Meditate much on salvation by grace through faith apart from works
1. Next week (God willing) we will focus on these famous verses entirely
 2. But it’s not too early to understand what the words mean that it is BY GRACE that we have been saved THROUGH FAITH... and this not FROM OURSELVES... it is the GIFT OF GOD... NOT BY WORKS... so that we cannot boast

3. Do your **BOASTING** in the **LORD!** Not in yourself

F. Non-Christians: Come to Christ **NOW...** while there's time!!