



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Ephesians 1:7-10

"Redeemed by Christ"

Ephesians

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] Thank you Howard, and good morning. We are continuing our study in Paul's epistle to the Ephesians. And so, if you have your Bibles open with me, follow along as I read beginning with verse 7 down to verse 10.

"In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace which He lavished upon us. In all wisdom and insight He made known to us the mystery of His will."

I want to pause here for a moment and make a few comments of a somewhat technical nature that we won't deal with in the lesson itself, and suggest a change in what I just read. Because I'm reading from the New American Standard Bible and it is possible to link the words, "in all wisdom and insight," the way the editors of this translation did by connecting them with the following clause in verse 8, so that we have "In all wisdom and insight He made known to us the mystery." The problem with that is it seems better to ascribe insight or understanding to man rather than God. That's what this translation does. It speaks of God's wisdom and insight being shown in the way He made known the mystery. That is possible.

But I think, as I said, it's a better understanding of the text to understand the insight and the wisdom to be that that comes from God but He's given to man, so it's our insight from God. In which case we could translate this "according to the riches of His grace which He

lavished upon us in all wisdom and understanding." Which in that case would make "wisdom and insight" a definition of the grace or help define the grace or give an aspect of the grace that He has lavished upon us. And so if that's the case – and it is how I will be taking this – we could read, or should read this:

" – according to the riches of His grace which He lavished upon us in all wisdom and insight, He made known – " or we could translate this: "having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth. In Him – "

May the Lord bless this reading of His Word and bless our time of study together. Let's bow now in a word of Prayer.

[Prayer] Gracious God and heavenly Father, we do thank you for the great privilege that we have to come together as your people, as a people who have been redeemed by the blood of your Son. As Paul instructs us in this morning, a people who have been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb from the foundation of the world. And it calls our minds back to the great work of grace that you have done on our behalf, and reminds us that what we have we have by no work of our own, by no merit of our own but is a gift from you. And we thank you for that, Father, and pray that our time of study this morning would be one in which we learn more about your goodness, your kindness of grace to us and what you have done for us in your Son, how you have sent Him into the world to be our atoning sacrifice. And may we be moved by that to go out into the world ourselves as your representatives and proclaim that to others, proclaim it to a lost and dying world.

Thank you for the grace that is ours in Christ. And may we be moved by that this morning as we study it. Father, we see your grace in so many things. We see it, first and foremost, in the offering of

your Son for us. But we see it in the way in which you give gifts to us all through the day, all through our lives.

Thank you for the material blessings that we have and we have much. And yet, we pray that you would bless those who are lacking them and who need them: those who are unemployed or those who are sick. And we have those names of individuals who have requested our prayers before us in our bulletin. We pray for them; we pray for others. We pray for the sick that you give healing.

We pray that you give encouragement. We pray that you give employment where it is needed. We pray for those men and those women who are employed but who need our prayers in that employment. We think of the businessmen who are burdened with the demands of time from their work, and yet have the responsibilities at home as well. We pray that you give them great wisdom and diligence that they might manage their time well, that they might be industrious in their labors, and that you might bless them in all that they do.

And bless each of us, as we seek to grow in our knowledge of you and in the knowledge and the grace of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Bless us now to that end. Bless us this evening, when we come back to worship our Lord in the Lord's Supper tonight, as we take of that and we think about His coming and the offering that He made for us and what it has done for us, what we are in light of that. And as we reflect upon the fact that the one who came for us the first time will come for us a second time. And may we look forward to that, and may that give us good perspective on the lives that we are now living.

May we live life not for the moment but for the future, for the glory to come which will certainly come. So we pray that you bless our time together now as we study, and bless our time this evening. And bless us throughout the week that we would rejoice in the salvation that we have, rejoice in the grace that you have given. And may it be reflected in our lives, in our speech, in the things that we do

and say, and may it be a reality within our hearts. We pray these things in our Savior's name. Amen.

[Message] One of the greatest words in the Bible – arguably the greatest – is the word, "grace." Unmerited favor, God's gift. Paul loves that word and in chapter 2, he will write: "For by grace you have been saved." And he repeats that twice – in verse 8, and in verse 4 before that. And he makes it very clear that salvation is all of grace, and without grace there is no salvation.

Salvation is a gift. It is free. It cannot be earned, it cannot be merited. And to emphasize that fact and to make it very clear, we sometimes speak of grace as free grace. But free grace is not cheap grace.

It is free to us, but it cost God dearly. And Paul shows just what it cost Him in our passage this morning in Ephesians 1:8, a verse that summarizes the whole essence and content of the gospel, and demonstrates the greatness of God's grace and the depth of His love. It's a verse that gives real meaning to the familiar words, "God is love." That He a loving God, that He is a gracious God is very clear from the previous passage, verses 3 through 6, where Paul praises the Father for His eternal election of His people, His unconditional election of them. "He chose us before the foundation of the world," the apostle says.

Before we had ever existed, before we had ever done good or bad, He chose us. He chose us for holiness, He chose us for adoption and to be to His praise and glory. And he chose us for all of that and all of those blessings and all of the spiritual blessings in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus out of His love. But the depth of that love, the measure of that grace is seen in what He did for us through the work of His Son in redeeming us, through the sacrifice that Jesus Christ made for us on the cross. That's where Paul takes up now, in verse 7, where he moves from praise of God the Father to praise of God the Son, when He moves from heaven to earth, when He moves from eternity past to time past.

In verse 6, Paul referred to Christ as the beloved, and that is a good description. That is a good title for us to bear in mind as we go through this passage and think of what Christ did for us, what God the Father sent forth in our place. He is the beloved, the one whom God the Father loved with an infinite love, loved from all eternity, the beloved. Well, that's how he describes Him in verse 6. And in verse 7, he states that it is in Him, in the beloved that we have redemption.

And with redemption, he will then explain we have forgiveness, we have abundant grace, we have wisdom. All of these things are what make up redemption; they come to us through redemption. Now, redemption means deliverance by a ransom, by the payment of a price. It was sometimes used of freeing a slave by a payment, by a ransom. It was a term that must have had a lot of significance for Paul's audience because they lived in a day and they lived in a society of slavery.

It is estimated that there were something like six million slaves in the Roman empire at that time. And some of those slaves had become Christians and they were a part of the church. In fact, one of them that we know quite well is Onesimus, slave of Philemon who had left his master in Colossi and had fled to Rome. And there in Rome, he'd become a Christian. He'd come under the influence of the apostle Paul.

Perhaps he'd been in difficulty and sought him out, and through Paul's ministry he had come to faith. And so Paul writes that brief letter to Philemon, interceding for his new son in the faith, Onesimus. Well, I think Onesimus was just one of many slaves of that empire who had come to faith in Jesus Christ and had come into the church. And so this term, "redemption," would have had special significance for them. And it's used, I think, in light of that.

It's used to describe our salvation, because we, in the past, were all slaves. Regardless of our station in life, socially, we all begin as slaves, slaves to sin until Christ came and redeemed us. He, as it were, entered the slave market of sin and purchased our freedom.

That which was lost by Adam was regained by Christ. There's a story that is often told that helps to illustrate this great transaction that made us God's possession. I

In a city on the shore of a great lake there lived a boy who was fascinated with the water and with sailing. And so with the help of his father, he spent a number of months making a model sailing ship. When he finally finished it, he had a beautiful boat, and he would take it down to the lake and sail it. But one day a gust of wind carried it out into the lake out of sight, and he lost it. He spent many days walking along the shore trying to find it, but he never found it.

Then one day he was walking through town and there in the window of a shop was his beautiful boat. And so he went in and told the owner that it was his boat and he wanted to claim it. But the owner told him he couldn't have it. He had paid a lot of money to a fisherman for the boat, and if the boy wanted the boat, then he would have to pay the price. So the boy went home and he went to work.

Every day he did whatever he could to earn enough money. Finally, he had the amount, returned to the store and he purchased the boat. As he left the store holding his prize possession in his arms, he said, "You are twice mine now because I made you and because I bought you." Well, that's what the Lord did for us. He made us and he ransomed us, He bought us.

He entered this fallen world, and out of it He purchased His church with the payment of His life, at the price of His blood. And through His blood, Paul says, "we have redemption." Peter says the same thing in 1 Peter 1:18-19: "knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ." One of my favorite passages in the Bible is the new song of Revelation chapter 5, which the 24 elders in heaven sing to Christ the Lamb who is worthy: "For, they sing, "Thou wast slain, and didst purchase for God with Thy blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. And

Thou hast made them to be a kingdom of priests – a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth."

The price of our redemption was blood. That's the way each of the apostles put it: "Purchased for God with Thy blood," writes John; "Redeemed with precious blood," writes Peter; "Redemption through His blood," writes Paul. It's as though the apostles got together, maybe at the Jerusalem council after they had settled the issue of circumcision, that we're not saved by any sacrament, any act of our own but simply by grace.

And they thought, "How can we express this clearly about the death of Christ? What one term can we use?" And they came up with this term blood. I don't think that happened, but they all use that word, and they all use it because it's the word the Holy Spirit had given to them. And yet, to many, that's a very offensive word.

I was reminded of that back years ago when I was in seminary. I had a professor of preaching, who was trying to instruct us that we need to be careful about the words that we use, because some of the words that are very familiar to us can be offensive to other people who may not be quite as familiar with them. And the word that he used as an example was the word, "blood." That offends people. And the example he gave was of a woman who was offended by that great hymn by William Cowper, "There is a Fountain."

"There is a fountain filled with blood drawn from Emmanuel's veins/And sinners plunged beneath that flood lose all their guilty stains." That seemed very grim to that woman, which seems to me a great hymn of the faith and great expression of truth. It's not something that Cowper invented. That is a term that's taken from the Scriptures. That's an apostolic expression.

As offensive as that may be to individuals – this expression, "blood" – the apostles are very deliberate in their use of it. Because it indicates not only that Christ died to save us, but it indicates very clearly the kind of death that He died. It wasn't enough that Christ

died. He had to die in a special way, and the word, "blood," indicates the nature of that death. It was a violent death.

It was the death of a sacrifice, the kind of death that the people of Israel were familiar with, the kind of death that they witnessed in the tabernacle, and later in the temple. Morning and evening, year by year, down through Israel's history was the sacrifice of bulls and goats and lambs on the altar. It was a blood-soaked altar at the temple and at the tabernacle, the place where sacrifices were made. And that's what Christ was. He was a sacrifice.

That was the price of our redemption, our deliverance, which brings, Paul says, "the forgiveness of our trespasses." And there is no redemption. There is no freedom from bondage. There is no release from sin, from its guilt and curse apart from blood. The author of Hebrews makes that very clear. "Without shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness."

That hardly fits with the modern ideas of God and forgiveness, which imagine forgiveness as simple as pardoning an offense and putting it behind us, just speaking a word, forgiving and forgetting. Now, that may be true of us and we do that. But it can never be true of God. God is holy; He is just. And nothing can compromise that, not even His great love.

That's one of the great mistakes today, I think, that people recognize that God is love. And, of course, He is. First John chapter 4 tells us that very fact: "God is love." But the mistake comes when people then assume that He is, therefore, like an indulgent parent who simply overlooks our sins, that He loves too much to punish. For one thing, that's not love.

And parents discover that if out of deep affection for their children, they overlook wrongdoings that they commit, overlook their sins. Eventually, those sins increase and they come back to plague the family and plague the parents. Sin must be dealt with. Wrongdoing must be dealt with. It's not love to ignore such things, and it's certainly not just.

We expect from our government, we expect from our law courts justice, don't we? Of course we do. We become angry when we don't see it. But should we expect anything less from God? Would the world have applauded the decisions at Nuremberg if the war criminals that had been brought there had simply been dismissed. Of course it wouldn't.

Should we expect anything less from God? Shall not the judge of all the earth do right? He is not only love, He is also light in whom there is no darkness at all. And so He cannot preach sin with any measure of indifference. He cannot simply dismiss it by divine fiat and still do right.

He has said that sin is sin; it is wrong and that it must be punished. And he has set that penalty. In all of His infinite wisdom, He has set that penalty to be the penalty of death. And God can never contradict Himself. He can never violate His justice.

He can never contradict His nature. He must do right; He must be consistent with Himself; He must be true to His Word; He must maintain His moral order. And so to erase sin, He must erase it justly, if justice means anything, if love means anything. And so the problem that had to be worked out within the Godhead, if we can put it in human terms, was how He could act in love toward men without violating His justice, how He could forgive the sinner without ignoring His law, how to be both just and a justifier. And divine wisdom found a solution in a substitute.

That is what Christ became. He became a man in order to suffer and die in the place of men. The Father sent His Son into the world to be His Lamb, to be His sacrifice for us. And there at the cross, God laid the sins of men, the guilt of His people on His Son, on His Beloved, and punished Him in our place so that through faith in Him we might escape that punishment, that eternal death that is the wages of sin. "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."

Perhaps the best illustration of this is the great day of atonement found in Leviticus 16, when once a year the high priest would make a sacrifice for the nations. It involved two animals, two goats. The first was slain on the alter. And his blood was collected by the high priest and then he would enter into the tabernacle and go into the Holy of Holies. And there he would sprinkle this blood upon the Mercy Seat which was upon the Ark in which the two tablets were, the tablets of the law, signifying that the law had been transgressed, and signifying that without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.

Then the high priest, when he finished that task, would take the second goat, called the scapegoat, and put his hands on it. He confessed the sins of the nation, and in doing that transferred Israel's sin, Israel's guilt to that goat. And then the goat was driven away into the wilderness never to be seen again, signifying that that is what the shedding of blood does. That is what occurs through sacrifice, the removal of sin. Now, that is a beautiful picture of what God did when He transferred our guilt to His Son and punished Him in our place.

"The just for the unjust," Peter says, "in order that He might bring us to God." And so the solution was found in the substitute where God's justice was fully satisfied, so that His love could be poured out on the sinner in forgiveness. And the fact that forgiveness comes through justice, magnifies and clarifies the love and the grace of God far more than it would be seen if He had simply spoken a word and dismissed sin in that way. Now, many today would say, "That's not so, that that's archaic, that that's a pagan idea. God is greater than needing to have a sacrifice.

"God's love is far more than needing to punish. God loves too much to punish." Yet, let me ask you. Is it greater love to simply dismiss sin or greater to pay a price for the dismissal of sin? Imagine this situation and ask yourself, "Which is the greater love?"

Imagine that you have committed a great crime against your employer and you've embezzled a large sum of money. You've spent it all and you've been found out. What is a greater act of love? For

the employer to simply say, "Don't worry. All is forgiven. Let's just forget about the whole thing."

Or to say, "I will forgive you, but you've committed a great crime with tragic consequences. You've ruined the company; you've put people out of work. And all of these things have to be cleared away." And so you think, "Well, he'll forgive me but now I'm going to have to face the consequences of my crime and repay millions and millions of dollars, which I don't have, serve a long prison sentence that may consume my life. But he'll forgive me with all of that."

And then the employer says, "Here's what I'm going to do. I'll clear these things away myself. I will bear the consequences of your crime. I will make restitution out of my own account and pay the debt. I will go to prison and serve your sentence in your place, the sentence that you deserve. I will suffer in your place."

Which is the greater expression of love? Obviously, the greater love is seen in what cost the man much than in what cost him nothing. And that's true of God. He decreed to pardon the sinner, but at the – not at the expense of His law. And so, out of love, the Son agreed to suffer in our place, and the Father, out of love to the Beloved, to be that sacrifice. And in so being to vindicate His justice so that He could then freely forgive all who believe in Him, so that He could be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

And through faith our pardon is complete. That was the promise of the Old Testament as it looked forward to the new, as it looked forward to the new covenant, the promise of the ancient prophets as they prophesied the new covenant. The promise in Jeremiah, in Jeremiah 31:34, as our Lord spoke to him, was "I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more." And He has done that. He has cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.

He has separated all of them, "as far as the east is from the west." The blood of bulls and goats could never do that. The author of Hebrews tells us that they could only be a reminder of sins. From

that great day of atonement, they would be the reminder of sin. They could not remove sin.

It took the infinite death of Christ to do that. And that it removed all of our sins is clear from the next phrase, in which Paul says, is "according to the riches of His grace." Notice, Paul doesn't say, "Our forgiveness is out of God's riches" but "according to" them. There is a big difference. Donald Grey Barnhouse used to illustrate the difference from a famous image of John D. Rockefeller.

Rockefeller was, in his day, the richest man in the world and the richest man American has ever produced. But he became known as a ruthless businessman. And so to polish up his image, he or his PR department came up with the idea of photographing him handing out dimes to children. And so it became a very common scene: John D. Rockefeller, all dressed up in his dark coat and his top hat, handing out dimes to little children. It was supposed to make him look generous.

Well, that's an example of giving out of a person's riches. I know a dime was worth more then than it is now. But still, that is not according to his riches. God doesn't give out of His riches. He gives to us "according to the riches of His grace."

And that's how He forgives. His grace has been likened to a never-ending sea. You think that you can see across it. And then you launch out into it, and as you come to the horizon you find that there's another horizon. As you come to that, you find that there's another horizon, and another, and another.

You find that this is a sea that has no end. There's no bottom to it. It's a sea without floor and without shores. And all of our sins, all of them have been cast into it, swallowed up in grace so that not one sin remains. Grace that is greater than all of our sins, greater than the greatest of our sins.

That's what Paul says, in Romans chapter 5, where he writes: "Where Sin abounded, grace did much more abound." God's grace is

infinite. It is sufficient. It is completely satisfying and it is free. God has already paid the cost.

And so, Isaiah, looking forward to the cross, having written about the work of the servant, the suffering servant, in chapter 53 of his prophecy, writes in chapter 55: "Every one who thirsts, come to the waters; And you who have no money come, buy without money and without cost." That's free grace. We can add nothing to it. We can only receive it and receive it through faith alone. In fact, to try to add to the work of Christ is to insult God.

David Martyn Lloyd-Jones makes the point by asking, "Is there anything more insulting to a person who is giving you a gift out of the largeness of his heart than for you to put your hand in your pocket and say I would like to give you something for that"? That's an insult. That's an insult to a man's generosity and his goodness. And that's what men do who try to earn their salvation. They are trying to give God something for His gift of salvation, His gift of forgiveness.

But there is nothing that we can do. There is nothing that we can give that can begin, even begin to pay off the debt that we owe, nothing that we can do that can remove one sin that is against us. Paul says that comes only through the blood of Christ which reconciles us completely to God, does not leave us unreconciled in any way. Because all of our sins have been taken care of. We are completely and absolutely reconciled to God through the cross of Jesus Christ.

That's the riches of God's grace. And it was to Paul a constant source of amazement that he who had been a proud Pharisee, a man of the law, self-righteous and opposed to grace, a persecutor of the church, a blasphemer of Christ, that he should have been forgiven, forgiven of all of that. And not only that, but also called to be an apostle and sent out throughout the world to preach the gospel to a lost and dying world. That to him was amazing. It filled him with wonder.

So he writes of grace continually. That's his great theme. It filled him with wonder, and it should fill us with wonder. And it should be the theme of our lives as well. I think that we show, and we can know within ourselves the degree to which we understand the love of God, the grace of God to the degree that we rejoice in it.

Not to the degree that we do things, as important that that is. But that's not the measure of our commitment and our love of the Lord. It's an internal thing. It is an appreciation and a love. And where that appreciation and that love is, there will be proper action and work and labor in His behalf.

So we, like Paul, should be filled with wonder over grace because we have been forgiven "according to the riches of His grace." But Paul's not finished. He says of this grace that God has "lavished it upon us," by giving us grace "in all wisdom and insight." So he not only removes our sins, and in so doing makes us acceptable to Him, but he also supplies us with the ability to live in a way that is acceptable to Him.

He gives us wisdom, which Armitage Robinson, who's written one of the classic commentaries on the book of Ephesians – it's an older commentary, but still probably the best commentary on the Greek text – he has defined these words in this way. He defines "wisdom" as "the knowledge which sees into the heart of things, which knows them as they really are," and "insight" as "the understanding which leads to right action." J.B. Phillips, who was well known for his paraphrase of the New Testament some 30, 40 years ago, used to pray, "Help me to see through illusion and not be content with false values. Help me to value the truly good things wherever they appear."

Wisdom and insight enable us to do that, to see the world as it is and for what it really is, and to adopt God's values and not the values of this age. To live for Him and to live for what is eternal, to recognize what is best and to recognize the best way to do it." And here's an example of that kind of wisdom and that kind of insight. It's from a prayer in Psalm 90, Moses' prayer in which he prays, "Teach us

to number our days that we present to These a heart of wisdom."
Christians do that.

They understand, as Moses writes earlier in that Psalm, that all our days, even if we live to be 80 – and we can add to that 90 or 100, or whatever the age you want to add to that – soon are gone. Regardless of the number, "soon they are gone and we fly away." Life is short, and whether we really realize it or not or really believe that we are all mortal. And the only things of importance in this life are eternal things. So the wise person takes our Lord's counsel and lays up his or her "treasures in heaven where neither moth nor rust destroys."

Wisdom is found in a man like Moses, who as a young man had the world at his feet. He was a prince, had position; he had wealth; he had power; he had education. And yet, at a point in his youth, as a young man, he turned his back on all of that, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, possibly rejecting the throne of Egypt itself. And the author of Hebrews tells us, "choosing rather to endure ill-treatment with the people of God and to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, considering the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he was looking to the reward." He was looking down the line.

He was looking into the future, in the certain future of what was coming and what was eternal. To have that perspective is a gift of God. To be able to see through the trends of the day and not be swept along in the course of this world, to be able to set yourself apart from all of that and spend time in meaningful pursuits, that is unusual. That is rare and that's from God. Wisdom is a gift of grace and so it should be valued.

Young people are to value that, seek wisdom so that they can know what is before them and the world that they are in, and not getting trapped by it. Old people need the same thing. We all need this wisdom, and it is ours in Christ. It's to be valued. And when we

lack it, James said we're to simply ask for it and God will give it "generously and without reproach."

It's ours, one of the many spiritual blessings in the heavenly places that we have in Christ. But wisdom is not simply something we have in a great treasury in heaven that we draw upon. In fact, principally we receive wisdom, we gain this wisdom that is ours through the Word of God. And God gives it in connection with His revelation, through the study of Scripture. And that's what he describes in verse 9.

That's the sense of "He made known to us the mystery of His will." So we have wisdom, we have insight because He has made know to us a mystery. This word, "mystery," becomes particularly important later in chapter 3. And it doesn't mean – as Dr. Johnson often says when he deals with this word – it doesn't mean something's mysterious or something's eerie. It's not like a mystery novel that if we read carefully we can pick up the clues and solve the riddle.

It's just the opposite. It refers to a secret that has been made known, something that we – that cannot be discovered by human reason. It can only be known through revelation, by being revealed to us. And God has done that. Having redeemed us, having forgiven us and adopted into His family, He has revealed to us family secrets.

He has given us a special revelation in regards to future blessings. That's the content of the mystery here, what Paul describes in verse 10 as "the summing up of all things in Christ." We know the plan of the ages. We know where history is going, that it is not going in circles, but it is moving toward a great and glorious goal in which all things will be gathered together under Christ's rule. "Things in heaven," Paul says, "and things upon the earth."

All of God's people, those who are in heaven and those who are upon the earth when He comes – the angels too – will be brought together in Christ. Now, that's not all, because this expression, "all things," also refers to the universe. In Hebrews 1:3, the author uses it in that sense. And so Paul is writing of the regeneration of the entire

universe, the new heavens and the new earth, what Paul describes in Romans 8:20-23. There he says that because of Adam's sin "the creation was subjected to futility," put under the curse.

But He did so, Paul says, in hope, with a view toward freedom. We read in that passage, in verse 21, "that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God." And then he goes on to say, "For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now. And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body." We experience those pains and we groan, and we see the groaning of the universe in the chaos around us.

And that can be very hard, particularly if you're in the midst of it. And yet, there's hope in all of that, because those are signs of what's coming. Those are groanings for the freedom come and the glory to come. And someday, all the redeemed throughout the ages, all the universe and the elect angels, everything will be united in Christ, glorified and blessed and singing praise to God for His grace which has brought us to that place. That's the goal of all things.

That's God's eternal plan, and His plan cannot be frustrated. He assures us of that in Isaiah 46:10. He assures us of that throughout the Bible. But in that passage, He says, "My purpose will be established, and I will accomplish all My good pleasure." God will accomplish His plan.

Nothing can change that; nothing can alter that. And that's a truth that gives stability. And we can wake up every morning to a new crisis, and we can open up our newspapers and read of political and financial instability, of terrorism reaching our shores, of the fall of the dollar, of the stock market crashing. We read of all these things, and yet, when we realize that God is sovereign, He gives stability. That's the importance of doctrine, the practicality of doctrine.

It is as one understands this, understands who God is, that He is in complete control, that the range of history hasn't slipped from His hand, that He has a plan. And by His grace, He has made us a part of that plan. And that plan is certain to be accomplished. It's as we understand that that we can then be calm and not fret over the things that go on around us. The unbelieving world cannot have that kind of stability.

It cannot have that because it does not know this mystery, this revelation that He has given. The goal and meaning of history cannot be understood by human reason. Everything about current events, everything about the scientific speculations about the universe and the direction that it is headed, all of that dealt with in human reason leaves the unbelieving world to come to very pessimistic views about things. Like Macbeth, who sounded very contemporary when he described history as a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing. Well, that is the estimate that the world comes to as it looks at the things around us.

There's nothing hopeful in them. But that statement by Macbeth, that sentiment by philosophers and scientists today is wrong. History has meaning. It has purpose. It is moving in a direction.

God has given us wisdom and insight through the revelation of His plan so that we can live in hope with perspective on the present. That's what the revealing of His mystery was intended for, to instruct us and to motivate us in how we are to live our lives in the present in light of the future and the glory that will certainly come. That is what enabled Paul to say, with complete confidence in the plan of God, "I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us." Every believer should have that confidence because of who God is, that God is absolutely sovereign. And Paul makes one thing very clear in this text – throughout his writings – but in this text it is that God is sovereign, absolutely.

And that should give us great confidence. We should have confidence because of who God is, but we should also have confidence because of what Christ has done. He has gained for us the future because He has gained for us forgiveness. Paul says, "In Him we have redemption." In our now.

We don't hope to have it. We actually have it. We have the forgiveness of sins now. Forgiveness is a present possession. That is why every believer in Jesus Christ can rest in Him.

That's what He promises. To all who come to Him and take their – His yoke upon them, He promises to give them rest. But we cannot have rest if we have sins hanging over us. If we know that there is some major sin that is secret to us and to God and has not been washed away, we can never have that confidence, we can never have rest. But the confidence that the Word of God gives us is that all of our sins, from the greatest to the least, have been covered by the blood of Christ, and they've been "separated as far as the east is from the west."

And that is why we can rest in Him, why we can have confidence before God, and approach Him at all times as our loving Father, even in the midst of sin. In fact, that is when we particularly should approach Him, with our sins and in confession of those sins. And we can know that when we come to Him, He will always receive us. Now, some think that's a dangerous confidence to believe that you are saved and you are secure and you are forgiven of all your sins, that that's presumptuous and that that leads to careless living, to moral indifference. But that's false.

Confidence in Christ, in the absolute sufficiency of His sacrifice is not presumptuous at all. It is to simply believe the Word of God. It is simply to magnify the grace and the glory of God, and to say He's that great. You can't magnify Him enough. And it's not presumptuous to have confidence in the absolute sufficiency of His sacrifice and that we have complete forgiveness.

In fact, as Spurgeon said, "That confidence in our forgiveness is Christianity's highest moral force. It is the appreciation of the grace of God and what is accomplished in us that moves us to live obedient lives." It's what moved the apostle Paul to spend his life in our Lord's service suffering for the gospel gladly because of what he had received. He was filled with wonder over the grace that God has extended to him. We have a very good illustration of that in Luke chapter 7, where that sinful woman who came into the Pharisee's house where our Lord was dining.

She approached our Lord and she washed His dusty feet with her tears and she wiped them with her hair. She loved much because she was forgiven much. Can you say that you've been forgiven much, that you have redemption? You can if you have believed in Christ, because redemption, deliverance, the forgiveness of sins is only in Christ. It is only in Him and in no one else.

And if you have put your trust in Him, then you have that confidence that all of your sins have been removed. You have the confidence that you are among the redeemed and you have a glorious future. And that is reason for rejoicing and praising God. But and if you have not believed in Him, then you cannot have that certainty. You cannot have any peace about the present, about the future.

You can only have the certainty that your sins remain and that they are against you. So come to Christ. He's opened up the way to forgiveness through His blood. He has paid the price, so forgiveness is free. As Isaiah said, "Come to the waters, buy and eat without money and without cost." Come to Christ by faith.

Receive the gift of His sacrifice. Grace is not cheap, but it is free to all who believe. And it covers and removes the greatest of sins. Removed the sins of John Newton, a very sinful man, a slave trader. And an understanding of that grace and that forgiveness moved him to write that great hymn about grace, "Amazing Grace." Let's stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Gracious God and heavenly Father, we do thank you for the grace that you have given to us, the gift of your Son, the gift of redemption and forgiveness, the gifts that are ours with all of the blessings, the spiritual blessings in the heavenly places in Him. We thank you for more than we can begin to comprehend. In fact, we will spend eternity learning to comprehend all that you've given us and all that you are.

We praise you for your love and your grace, ask you to now change us and make us men and women who appreciate that grace more and live in light of it, and spread the good news of the grace to others. Bless us throughout the week. Bless those who are away on business, who are traveling, who are preaching the gospel abroad. Bless them with health and safety in their return. Bless us now, we pray in Christ's name. Amen.