

Title: Alive
Date: April 16, 2017
Subject: Easter
Scripture: Ephesians 2:1-9

In 2008, terrorists rampaged through Mumbai, India in a series of coordinated attacks over a violent three-day spree. The group attacked key city landmarks, a luxury hotel and a Jewish center. They killed 173 people and injured 234. The lone terrorist who was captured was 22-year-old Mohammad Ajmal Kasab. A security camera caught him walking through Mumbai's railroad station wearing a knapsack and carrying an AK-47. He admitted belonging to the terrorist group and taking part in the attacks. In May of 2010, a court found Kasab guilty on more than 80 charges, including murder and waging war on India. He was sentenced to death by hanging. India's Supreme Court later upheld the sentence. In 2012, Kasab appealed for mercy to India's president to spare his life.

Would you grant mercy to someone who had done what Kasab did? Suppose your mother or your sister were among the 173 people who died that day? Suppose your dad or your brother were blinded or confined to a wheelchair for life as a result of Kasab's actions. Can you even begin to imagine a mercy great enough to pardon Kasab and give him his life?

Some crimes are simply too heinous to overlook. Justice demands that those criminals pay! The greater the crime, the greater the punishment.

But what does this mean for all the Bible says about mercy? What happens when God's justice and God's mercy collide? The relationship between God's justice and God's mercy is paradoxical. God is both completely just and totally merciful. In justice, God must and does punish sin. He must avenge wrongdoing—and not just the wrongdoing done by terrorists in Mumbai. God must also punish the wrongdoing ordinary people commit. God's justice demands that he must judge our violence, our gossip, our lies, our thankless attitudes, our selfishness, the irritable words we say to one another, the angry thoughts we harbor in our hearts and the push to be independent of him. There's no demanding justice than God's justice.

When we approach God and his justice with the thorough seriousness it deserves—we find ourselves appealing for mercy for ourselves because of the depth of our sins. No human court or authority can grant that kind of mercy. We need the mercy only Christ can give.

But here's the good news: there's no greater mercy, no greater love than his. The passage that was read told us "But God is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so much, that even though we were dead because of our sins, he gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead" (Ephesians 2:4, 5).

The Apostle Paul sings the praises of the depth of God's mercy. Earlier in the same letter he wrote about the glorious grace that was freely given to us through Christ. "In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us" (Ephesians 1:7, 8).

It's like the Lord is a physician with his prescription pad. He writes out a prescription for grace. "To assure spiritual health in life and ministry, take a big dose of grace as soon as you wake up. Swallow completely. Take more mercy repeatedly throughout the day. Take extra doses of love at those moments when feeling tempted or facing trials. Refills - unlimited. No expiration date. Warning -- You can become addicted to grace, but that's not a bad thing."

The prescription is free to us but that doesn't mean that it doesn't have a cost. That cost was paid by Christ. It was the cost of his sinless life given in sacrifice.

Review what necessitated Christ to act. We were dead because of our sins. We had no signs of life in us. We couldn't breathe life into ourselves through our good works or our own supposed goodness. We couldn't alter our destination of hell. There was nothing we could do to change our situation. Corrupt. Impotent. Hopeless.

English preacher Charles Spurgeon describes our situation by viewing our hearts as a house with the Holy Spirit as the inspector. "Has he taken you first into one room, and then into another, and made you stand aghast while he has shown you the idols of your heart, the deep depravity that still remains in you, the pride, and sloth, and various forms of sin which still lurk and find shelter there? Have you ever had the filthy rags unrolled before your eyes? Have you heard the chattering of the unclean birds in the cage of your heart? Have you ever been fully conscious of the stench arising from your Old Adam nature? Has your spirit sickened at the very thought of the depravity of manhood in general, and of yourself in particular? Have you ever had your secret sins set in the light of God's countenance? Have you ever been made to see the blackness of your own sin side by side with the brightness of divine favor? Have you ever been made to taste the exceeding bitterness of your sin?...You have looked at your heart, and you have, seen its barren soil, and if there has been any wheat growing upon it, you have said, 'This is the result of the grace of God.' You have looked at the huge black rock of your Old Adam nature, and when you have seen rivers of living water flowing out of the very midst of it, you have been obliged to say, 'This mighty miracle could only have been wrought by the grace of God.'

John Newton the author of *Amazing Grace* said at age 82, "My memory is nearly gone, but I remember two things: that I am a great sinner — and that Christ is a great Savior!"

Someone, "Flimsy views of human depravity lead to very indistinct ideas of the grace of God."

You may have heard this question before, but it bears repeating. It's one in which we need to be crystal clear as to our answer. "If you were to die tonight and appear before God and He asked, 'Why should I let you into my heaven?' what would you say?" There's a lot of confusion. Many people would say that they have basically been a good person and haven't tried to hurt anyone. Or they might say that they've lived a good life and done the best they could. Or they might say they kept the commandments, and gone to church, read the Bible.

There are some good things, even noble things in there but they are insufficient to bring a dead person to life. The Bible passage makes it clear that we were dead in our sins. We couldn't resuscitate ourselves. Life has to come from an outside source. At least 6 times the love, mercy and grace of God is referred to as the means through which we can be saved from our sins.

We desperately needed mercy. And thank God, mercy came running in the person of Jesus Christ. He ran to the cross to get there before we could. He said, "Step aside. I'll take your place. I'll take your punishment." Jesus Christ went to the cross to die for us.

Death seemed to triumph, at least momentarily as it swallowed Jesus into earth's cold, dark silent tomb. The devil thought, "I've got you now. You can't escape my clutches." For three long days humanity seemed to hold its collective breath as the giver of Life lay cold on the stone. Though the sun rose in the east, there was a shroud of darkness over people's souls as the Light of the World was hidden in a jar. The one who said he was the gate had one made of stone seal him in. The One who said he was the truth seemed to be nothing but a lie.

Then....then.... The earth shook. Jesus leaps not only from the grave clothes he had been wrapped in, but also from the clutches of the devil. He rips through the gates of hell and tears off the chains that had bound peoples' souls. Life conquered death and sin and the devil. All their power is dead.

And then Jesus turns to us and offers us gifts that are ours if we will only receive them. God gives us mercy and grace and love and kindness—nothing that we deserved and everything that we needed. Because Christ is alive, we are alive, free, liberated. Sins – forgiven. Guilt – gone. Shattered beings -- whole. Acceptance – child of God. Destiny – heaven. Ongoing -- grace, mercy and love. It is finished and just beginning.

Third reading (after It is Finished and prior to Victory in Jesus)

He has just begun. Listen to these words from God's Word – **“24**God will also count us as righteous if we believe in him, the one who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. **25**He was handed over to die because of our sins, and he was raised to life to make us right with God...**5:1**Therefore, since we have been made right in God's sight by faith, we have peace with God because of what Jesus Christ our Lord has done for us. **2**Because of our faith, Christ has brought us into this place of undeserved privilege where we now stand, and we confidently and joyfully look forward to sharing God's glory...**9**And since we have been made right in God's sight by the blood of Christ, he will certainly save us from God's condemnation. **10**For since our friendship with God was restored by the death of his Son while we were still his enemies, we will certainly be saved through the life of his Son...**17**God's wonderful grace and his gift of righteousness, for all who receive it will live in triumph over sin and death through this one man, Jesus Christ...**21**So just as sin ruled over all people and brought them to death, now God's wonderful grace rules instead, giving us right standing with God and resulting in eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord...**5**Since we have been united with him in his death, we will also be raised to life as he was. **6**We know that our old sinful selves were crucified with Christ so that sin might lose its power in our lives. We are no longer slaves to sin...**22**But now you are free from the power of sin and have become slaves of God. Now you do those things that lead to holiness and result in eternal life. **23**For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 4:24, 25; 5:1, 2, 9, 10, 17, 21; 6:5, 6, 22, 23, NLT).

Because he lives, we too can live. Join in singing in his victory because his victory is our victory.

Prayer at end

Lord, we're thankful you died on the cross for us, that you gave your life for us. You took our pain, our hurt, our sorrow, our sins. We're sorry that we caused you to suffer. We're thankful that you rose from the dead and are alive and make it possible for us to live with you forever. We're thankful that you live in our hearts. We're thankful that you are who you said you are. We put our faith in your victory and believe that it becomes our victory when we place our faith in you. In your name we pray, Amen.

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One True God

[http://www.vevo.com/watch/steven-curtis-chapman/One-True-God-\(Official-Lyric-Video\)/USV3M1600033](http://www.vevo.com/watch/steven-curtis-chapman/One-True-God-(Official-Lyric-Video)/USV3M1600033)

Long Way Home

<https://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=long+way+home+lyrics+steven+curtis+chapman&view=detail&mid=9F7D4E4649320D3A0AFC9F7D4E4649320D3A0AFC&FORM=VIRE>

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One day, a bus driver was driving along his usual route. He didn't encounter any problems for the first few stops; a few people got on, a few got off, and things went generally well. At one stop, however, a big hulk of a man got on. He was 6' 8", built like a bodybuilder, and his arms hung down to the ground. He glared at the driver and told him, "Big John doesn't pay!" Then he sat down at the back of the bus. The driver was 5' 3", thin, and very meek, so he didn't argue with Big John. But he wasn't happy about it. The next day, the same thing happened. Big John got on again, made a big show of refusing to pay, and sat down. It happened the next day, and again the day after that. The bus driver began to lose sleep over the way Big John was taking advantage of him. Finally, he could stand it no longer. He signed up for bodybuilding courses, karate, judo, and a class on finding your self-esteem. By the end of the summer, the bus driver had become quite strong and felt really good about himself. The next Monday, Big John entered the bus and again declared, "Big John doesn't pay!" Enraged, the driver stood up, glared back at Big John, and bellowed, "And why not?!" With a surprised look on his face, Big John replied, "Big John has a bus pass." The bus driver learned a valuable lesson: Things are not always as they appear.

We have little or no control over what may be considered the most significant day of our earthly lives—the day of our death. We can eat healthy, take vitamins, exercise, and still die unexpectedly. A doctor told his patient, "I'm afraid you only have three weeks to live," "Okay then," the patient replied, "I'll take the last two weeks of July and the week between Christmas and New Year's."

Crawford Lorritys, Fellowship Bible Church in Roswell, Georgia, on Family Life today, February 1, 2016. A basic definition of faith is “God confidence.”

Crawford: Yes; because I think faith has been hijacked in recent years. We’ve confused faith with positive thinking, with optimism, with all these other things. We have self-talk and this kind of thing; but in the Bible, faith does not depend upon my own personal competencies or resources. It is outside of me—it is attached to my vision of God. So, if I have a clear vision of God and a picture of His greatness, then, it dictates to me the level of my confidence.

Dennis: When you say the words, “vision of God,” you’re not talking about seeing some kind of mystical appearance of God at that point. You’re talking about God as He has revealed Himself in the Bible.

Crawford: Yes; absolutely—and that’s a good catch right there—I don’t mean in a mystical sense—but I do mean that our picture of God is given to us by His revelation in these 66 books of the Bible. The more we *know* about God and apply the truths that we learn about God to our daily lives, it makes *clearer* to us in all facets of what our great God looks like or begins to look like more clearly in our own hearts and minds. That lays a foundation for our faith.

Bob: And in that sense, just the very act of praying is a step of faith because the fact that you’d go to God and say, “I need help,”—you wouldn’t go to somebody who you didn’t think couldn’t offer you the help. You are stating, “God is a source of help, and I’m coming to You because I believe You can help me.”

Crawford: Absolutely—absolutely, Bob. And that’s the reason we’ve got to stop making faith so mystical and so mythical; you know. Prayer, itself, is an expression—my definition of prayer is: An expression of my life-dependence upon God. That’s the reason why I pray. I *don’t* pray to make myself feel better. I *don’t* pray to vent. I *don’t* pray like I’m doing some yoga class with Bible verses. I *don’t* do that. I pray because I’m expressing to God: “There is a gap here. I need You to feel this gap, and I depend on You in all things.” So, it’s not worrying on my knees it’s not venting. It’s seeking the Ancient of Days to do what He has promised to do.

Crawford:shorten.....people at our church that are frustrated. They go to all the Bible studies, they come to all the services, they’re in small groups, they are going to precept classes, and all these wonderful things that they are doing—and there is no change. I’ve learned to ask them the question: “Have you surrendered your will to God? Have you surrendered it to God? You are doing the right stuff, but are you trusting Him?—are you trusting Him?” You can do all the right stuff and be as frustrated as the day is long—and that’s really the definition of legalism. You can part it out, you can step it out, you can chart it out, you can communicate it, and you can talk about it—but until you say: “Oh, God, You are my source. You are my

strength. You've given me right answers. Now, I believe You. By faith, I'm going to trust You; and You're going to use me to see these things transform my life."... belief and faith in the Bible are never separated from surrender and yieldedness. So, in that sense, it's not an intellectual assent, where I can compartmentalize my life and say: "Hey, yes, I believe that. I believe that." No, it's a *commitment* of me to that which I believe—if I say that I believe that God *CAN* and He *WILL* do this, then, I act accordingly.

The Bible doesn't define faith, it describes faith. Faith is a verb even when it's a noun. It's something you must do... God is not obligated to fulfill our wish list (presumption like the woman to the airport that she would get a free ticket when got there). It is accepting what he has promised to do. Not misinterpret Scripture. Difference between the promises of God and my desires. —there can be desires in our hearts that aren't clearly stated in God's Word. Ways to check that it isn't presumption— consistency of prayer, advice of godly counsel, doesn't conflict with the Word, how consistently it visits us, circumstances that indicate.

We follow Christ and not the presumption of comfort.

Three kinds of ways faith is operative. God can take us from situations. He also delivers us in a situation —sustain. Third, he'll deliver us through it.