

Loved in Christ (Eph 2:1-10)

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Date: 28 February 2021

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[0 : 0 0] All right, open your Bibles, please, if you can. And we're going to read from Ephesians chapter 2. And we're going to continue in our series. We're going to read from verses 1 through to verse 10.

This is the word of the Lord. As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, 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.

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.

But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ, even when we were dead in transgressions.

It is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus 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 : 2 4] For it is by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not from yourselves. It is the gift of God, not by works so that no one can boast.

For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

All right. Before we get into it, I'll just say that I think this is the most amazing passage in Ephesians. And so I'm very fortunate that I get to preach from this one.

But as we get into it, maybe I'll just pray for us. Heavenly Father, we do thank you so much for this very special passage, Lord God. And we thank you for the rich theology and how it speaks so deeply to our salvation and a testimony of your grace in each one of our lives.

And I just pray that you would help us to marvel at the wonder of our salvation as we look at this passage this afternoon. We pray all these things in Jesus' name.

[2 : 3 4] Amen. Have you noticed how beautiful our country is recently? The answer is probably no. Maybe the people who have just been down doing the Tongariro Crossing are kind of like, yeah, man, New Zealand is a beautiful country.

But I was reminded how beautiful New Zealand was when I had some friends from Australia come over and they were commenting on just how beautiful and green and lovely our country is.

But we weren't going anywhere special. We were just driving to Maraitai. And they were just stunned at the countryside and at the beach. And they just couldn't get enough. And for me, it was just really normal.

You know, I'd driven out that way. I'd driven between Papakur and Howick like the back roads, like hundreds of times because I worked and, you know, it was just all normal.

I hardly even glanced out the window. And I think we can be a bit like that. Things become so familiar to us. Beautiful things that we don't even notice. We like, we're kind of aware that people, when there's no COVID, fly from all over the world to little old New Zealand because they want to see like the Lord of the Rings scenery that we have just in our backyard.

[3 : 48] And now that we can't travel around the world, we're like, oh, we should probably take a trip to the South Island. And it's just stunning. We kind of realize, oh, wow, this country is amazing.

But we're just prone to lose some of that awe, that wonder at beautiful things. And I think this happens all around the world. So I don't think Parisians kind of walk past the Eiffel Tower and are like, wow, every single day.

I don't think people in Sydney like take pictures of the Sydney Opera House posing in front of it because it's just so normal and familiar to them. I think we're predisposed to lose our awe and wonder and things become familiar to us.

We go from being kind of awestruck tourists to just kind of disinterested far too easily. And this is not a huge problem, right?

Except if that also happens in our relationship with God. Do you lose your awe and wonder at the salvation you've been given? Have you gone from an awestruck tourist who's just marveling at what God's done for them to being, you know, a bit cool, a bit cold in your relationship to God?

[5 : 05] And that can happen. We come to church week after week. We pray prayer after prayer. We listen to Jesus and hear of him again and again. And it can happen that our joy and excitement just seeps out, just lowers, just goes missing.

Well, the passage this morning from Ephesians 2, 1 to 10, here we get to see God's grace and his saving power so clearly. Paul wants to teach us that we have gone from death to life by God's grace.

And if you believe in Jesus, no matter what your story of salvation is, no matter how you came to know Jesus, whether there was someone telling you on the streets, coming to church all your life, no matter what, this is a passage that speaks of your personal testimony of God's work in your life.

And so I'd just like to invite all of us to come and marvel and be filled with wonder again at God's grace and salvation in our life.

So let's look together with the purpose of marveling at our salvation. So first, as I said, we're going to see we were dead and deserving of wrath. We're going to see we were made alive with Christ.

[6 : 18] And that third, this is all by God's grace. So first of all, the bad news, we were dead and deserving of wrath. So in these opening verses, verses one to three, Paul really diagnoses all of humanity, but also our past life, if you're a Christian.

So look at verse one to three. And you were dead in your trespasses and sins in which you all once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience, among whom you all once lived in the passions of your flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

That isn't very pretty, is it? It's not a great start to the chapter. Paul literally calls us, calls humanity, the walking dead.

You know, we're zombies, walking around, looking like we're alive, but not really. Spiritually, we're dead. And this walk of death is described as being marked by trespasses and sins.

So they're pretty similar words, but trespass carries the idea of you're crossing the line. So you know what is right, but you deliberately disobey and step over the line.

[7 : 43] While sin refers to us kind of falling short of God's standards for what is right and missing the mark. So that might mean you're actually trying, you're aiming for the mark, but you miss.

Sometimes we do things wrong when we know it. Sometimes we try really hard, but actually still fall short. And that was the trajectory of our lives.

We were walking in sinfulness. And I think that for the most part, people are aware of that sin and trespass.

They probably wouldn't call it that, but they're just aware that there's something wrong. So this has led to a rise in online confessional websites. So if you want to, you could go find a website online where you can anonymously put your confession out there about what you've done so that other people can see it and like respond if they like.

But it's like, I need to get this off my chest. I know what I'm doing is wrong. And so we realize we're not perfect. We recognize this walk of death in our life.

[8 : 53] Sometimes we don't know. Sometimes we think that we're just pursuing what we individually want. We're free to live and enjoy life however we want.

And we think everything's going well. We think we're free. But really, if you're not a follower of Jesus, this passage says you aren't free even if you think you're living the life you want to.

So you'll see in verse two there that it says, on one hand, we're following the world. That is that people around us just influence us. We're not doing this through what we want. We're doing what everybody else thinks is best and enjoyable.

We're just following the crowd there. But then it's worse actually at a deeper level. We're following the prince of the power of the air. That of course is Satan who just has power over our world to misdirect us, to cause us to sin.

He has power there. And so we're following the world, but it's a world actually directed by Satan. And then on top of that, it also says we're pulled by the passions of our flesh and by the desires of our body and mind.

[10 : 03] And so our mind, our body, our desires, they're not always good and pure. In fact, they're broken and they can lead us astray even while we think we're free and doing what we want.

Before becoming a Christian, you may have thought that you had free will and control of your life and you were doing what you thought was best and most enjoyable. But here we see we weren't really free.

We were captive to the world, captive to our own flesh. So sometimes, you know, you know you want to do something, but you can't. But also captive to the devil, the more scary one.

And so we were always just followers. We were dead and we were walking away from God, following everyone and everything but God and walking in a way that Paul says was actually under God's wrath.

So children of disobedience, children of wrath. And this is really the spiritual reality of mankind we read, of every person on earth dead and deserving of wrath, unable to walk in a way pleasing to God, unable to experience the wonderful spiritual life that can be found in Jesus.

[11 : 19] So it isn't pretty, as I said, but that's what God has to say about the state of the world. But I imagine that you can think of people, non-Christians, who don't quite fit this description.

So people who you wouldn't characterize as children of disobedience, people who are pretty sure, you know, people you're pretty sure live about as well as you do.

I think this passage is not only trying to highlight when you do things that are wrong, but it's really addressing something deeper, that we are distant from God, that we are dead to God and so have a great inability to follow Him or to please Him or to live for Him.

Because all that we do, even the good things, is more about us and for us. I had a friend who was raised really well by non-Christian parents and he had said to me before he became a Christian that he thinks the Ten Commandments were really good rules that you should follow.

He probably kept them about as well as I did. And when he became a Christian, he really didn't need to make that many moral adjustments to his life. Yet even though he was quite a good guy before he was saved, he was just as dead as the rest of us, no matter what his life looked like.

[12 : 47] Paul wants us to understand that we're separated from God. Because of that, we're under His wrath. Because of that, we're not able to follow Him. It's because we are dead.

We're prone to think that we can fix this, that we can fix problems. So if you're broke, you can go get a job or move in with your parents. If you're unfit, you can get a gym membership and exercise.

If you're sick, you go to the doctor to find healing. But this spiritual deadness, it's not a problem that you and I can fix. We cannot make ourselves alive.

If you want to understand this predicament fully, go take a walk in your local graveyard and yell out to the dead, come to life. See if any of them have the power.

See if they respond. It doesn't happen. It needs something spiritual, supernatural. And we see this supernatural, spiritual act of salvation in verses 4 to 6.

[13 : 51] So we have been made alive with Christ. So look there at verse 4. But God, being rich in his mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive with Christ.

By grace, you have been saved and raised us up and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming age he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace and kindness towards us in Christ Jesus.

So you'll notice there's a huge change of tone in this passage. It's almost like it's a completely different book, but it's the good news. We heard the bad news, but here's the good news.

We've heard the diagnosis. It's dire, but it can be fixed. God can fix it because God is rich in mercy, because God loved us, because God can make us alive and raise us above this earthly place and to heavenly, heavenly realms.

We see why we're made alive. It's because of God. Paul kind of trips over himself. He uses so many different adjectives and verbs to describe how wonderful God's character is.

[15 : 11] He's merciful. He's great in love. He loves us. Even when we're dead, he made us alive. This is the wonderful God who loves us, loves us, who were following after others, following Satan, following our own heart and desires.

We were children of disobedience. Yet so great is God's love that he made us alive. Do you remember the great power from verses 19 and 20?

The immeasurable greatness of God's power which works in everyone who believes. Well, it's that great power that raised Jesus from the dead.

It's that great power that is able to seat us in the heavenly places. It's that resurrection power which makes us who were once dead alive in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Christ. And it goes further than just simply giving us life. It's this position he gives us. Together, he seats us in the heavenly places. And it says there that God's grace and kindness to us will be shown in the coming ages and it will be immeasurable so that I think in eternity, I think it's John Piper said that God's going to measure out more and more and more of his grace for all eternity and each day it's going to be more and more amazing.

[16 : 38] that Jesus has saved us. Immeasurable even if you keep measuring it out for all eternity. You see, when we get to heaven we'll be looking around and saying, wow, God saved me by his grace.

We'll see others, wow, God saved you by his grace. We were dead. We were following after other things yet God has made us alive. We were in the grave but he has raised us to heaven.

You know, every now and then you hear one of those crazy testimonies of a person who was kind of into drugs and went to prison and ended up homeless and on the street.

The only possession they had was a Bible that's stolen from a hotel and then they open it up to a verse and bang, they're saved. And we're just awestruck by that story.

It just seems so amazing to hear that. And then so sometimes we feel like our story of like growing up in church and like slowly realizing that this is true. We feel like that's not half as exciting but it is.

[17 : 43] Anytime we, someone is saved, it's amazing because you were dead. I was dead. Yet God made us alive. There's no greater miracle than that.

And everyone, every, in heaven, everyone will marvel that God saved them, that God saved others. Even the most obedient pastor's kid you have ever met that never went astray.

We will look at that person and say, wow, God gave that person life. God gave that person the ability to respond and follow after him.

We have gone from death to life. And then Paul makes us oh so clear that our salvation is all by grace. It's God. So look at verse 8 and 9.

For by grace you've been saved through faith and this is not your own doing. It's the gift of God, not a result of work so that no one can boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works which he prepared beforehand that we should work and walk in them.

[18 : 51] When you understand the diagnosis of humanity as the walking dead, you quickly realize that we can't help ourselves. That God had to make a move to give us life.

Now faith and belief it's so necessary. We do believe and turn and follow Jesus. There's no way to be saved without belief. But it is only after we've been made alive that we can respond in faith.

And that's why it's called a gift. The gift of God to us. It's a gift because we don't deserve it. We shouldn't expect it. We can't chase after it.

Instead, God has to freely offer it and make us alive. There's nothing we can do to earn our salvation. And that's why when we get to heaven, we will not boast.

And we should not boast today. We shouldn't even boast about our service to God here on earth and the life that he's working in us because it even says that the life we live, the good things we do are all of God's grace.

[19 : 58] It says God has prepared good works for us to walk in. And I want you to notice the word walk there because our testimony goes from walking in death to walking in life and a good godly life.

From having the devil work in us to being created to work for God. So part of the Christian life must be good works. Our new life must be displayed in the way that we live.

And from chapter four on, Paul is going to talk even quite specifically about this walk, about this life that's worthy of the gospel. But for now, he says, what's essential for you to know?

What I want you to know is that the Christian life is good works, but God's prepared them for you. They're by grace. So don't boast. Don't begin to think highly of yourself because you lead on the worship team because you're always there serving.

That too is God's grace in your life. From beginning to end, our salvation is all of grace. We would still be dead in sins if not for God.

[21 : 06] This truth should just kick pride in the gut, our pride in the gut, and do away with it. There's nothing better about us than the worst of people, than that stranger walking down the road, than our enemies.

The only difference maker is God. You may have heard the phrase, Christianity is one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread.

And that is us, beggars who have been graciously fed by God. The dead who have been made alive. We have gone from death to life, all by God's grace.

And if you're not a Christian today, then these verses invite you to know this grace and have life in Jesus. We all understand that we've done things wrong.

I'm sure we could all confess things anonymously online. Well, Ephesians in the Bible, he calls that trespasses and sins. And it shows that each one of us is far away from God.

[22 : 13] But as we heard, the wonderful news is that God is merciful and loving. And even though we're dead, even though we follow others, God will make us alive. He saves us and grants that we might have faith.

So do turn and believe in him. Follow him with your life. Not trying to work to earn his favor, but instead just asking for forgiveness and trusting that he has good things prepared for you.

If that's something you'd like to do or learn more about, I'd just encourage you maybe now in the chat to PM someone and just say, I would like to know more about how I can follow Jesus.

Perhaps you want to message William so that he can follow up and really encourage you. God wants to grant you life. God wants for you to believe. He is merciful, so please do turn to him.

And if you're a Christian, then I want to encourage you that your life has gone from one that was dead and now you're alive and that's by God's grace. That's the testimony of every single believer.

[23 : 26] Stop and think about this. Does that excite you? Does it excite you more than zero COVID in New Zealand? Does it capture your mind more than thinking about that overseas travel you really want to do, that experiences you miss out on?

The truth is that sometimes we are not captured with awe and wonder at our salvation. And to change that, I just encourage each one of you to gaze deeply into the gospel.

Gaze deeply into what God has done for you. Meditate on it. Do it every single day. Don't just briefly think about it, but stop and stare and reflect and thank the Lord God.

This is not something we just glance at. This is something that we gaze into. It would be really good if you could be like one of those, like your parents maybe or friends who go overseas and they take a million pictures.

They don't delete any. They don't edit any. They flick through each one and they tell you a little story about 500 pictures and it takes forever but you sit and listen because they are so excited about what they've seen.

[24 : 39] We want to be a little bit like that. Our friends thinking, wow, I wish they'd tone it down a little bit because they just keep talking about how amazing it is that Jesus has saved them.

That's what we want to do, be so amazed. In the book of Ephesians, it helps to do that. It just shows us, hey, every single one of you, has been saved. So gaze deeply into that.

Enjoy the book of Ephesians as you go through it together. And then finally, can I encourage you, one little practical way you can kind of stir this up in one another is to share your testimonies with one another.

Because in doing this, you kind of remind each other, wow, this is what God's done in each of our lives. He's brought you, my great friend, from death to life.

So you might be able to share your testimonies and your groups. I don't know if now is a good time. You probably have things to do, but make a time where you can tell one another how God has saved you.

[25 : 37] Perhaps if you don't have time for it, next time you're hanging out with a friend, just ask them, how did God save you? You might actually realize that lots of your friends, you haven't really heard how God worked in their life, but God has done it magnificently.

And you can kind of just encourage and stir one another up to remember how great it is that God has saved us. And as we do these things, as we gaze deeply, as we speak to one another about what God has done in our life, I think that will help us to marvel and capture a bit more of that joy.

Because as we see from this passage, it is so wonderful what God has done. We were dead, we were following the world, we were following the influence of the devil, and yet God made us alive.

And he wants to seed us with Jesus Christ in the heavenly places. So let's encourage one another as we head there together. Let me just pray for us that God would be at work in this way.

Heavenly Father, I just want to thank you for each story of salvation that is found in these people in the Zoom room. Lord, whether they're spectacular or just incredibly boring in an earthly sense, I want each person to grasp what a wonderful new life they've been given in the Lord Jesus Christ.

[26 : 57] Lord, give us a new fresh sense of awe and wonder at this, Lord, and please never allow it to run out. Lord, help us to know your great mercy and goodness and grace fresh each day this week.

If we, Lord, during lockdown can capture that again, Lord God, we pray that that would happen. We ask that in the coming weeks, months, or even years, that there would be opportunities for each person to share and encourage one another about how God's been at work in their life.

Heavenly Father, we thank you that you're such a good and gracious God. We thank you that we can have life with the Lord Jesus Christ. We thank you for all the good things you've prepared for us to do, and we give glory to you for all this.

We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Sam, if you're able to, we'd love to just run a bit of question time since we do have a few minutes.

There are two questions here, so maybe I'll just ask the first one. Oh, there's more coming in. So I'll just ask the first one for you, Sam, if you're willing. You mentioned a confession website.

[28 : 06] So maybe, I think this person was just worried that if we use a confession website, people would rely on other people instead of confessing to God directly. Do you have any other thoughts about, yeah, just why people seem to want to use a confessional site and what's a better alternative?

So the better alternative is, yes, definitely to confess to God. That is the very best place. Second is you can confess to one another.

So that is another thing that the Bible says, which is really important. So confessing to someone anonymously, I don't actually think is that helpful. It kind of relieves you of a bit of a burden, but I don't think it builds any trust and deep relationship that someone knows your sin, knows your struggle and is there to help.

So I think lots of people today have a problem with sin and in their life. And we have this picture of life that's supposed to be good and perfect, like through social media and different things and we're supposed to be able to live free and however we want, but it just doesn't match.

And so they're not sure what to do with it. So rather than come to Jesus, rather than come to church, they go to anonymous websites to kind of relieve themselves. So I wouldn't encourage that.

[29 : 25] But I think that's what some people do. Anyone who does that, I'd say come and confess it to Jesus. He'll give you lasting forgiveness. Yeah. Awesome. Another question, you mentioned sharing our testimonies as a great idea to marvel at God's grace.

Any tips? Some of us have never spoken in public, so we're a bit nervous about sharing a testimony. So any tips about how to share testimonies or maybe some of us share it, but it's pretty boring.

It sounds like the same cookie cutter one. So yeah, any tips and advice on how to share testimonies? I've never shaped my testimony around this, but I recently read of a great way to do it, that you figure out kind of what makes you tick, what idol it is at the center of your life that you most struggle with, and then you share how I guess Jesus fulfills that.

Whether you're someone who is fearful of people and so would just go around doing whatever people asked you to, so that was a little bit of me, but then you met Jesus and he says you don't have to do anything for me, but I've loved and given myself to you, and then you're like wow, I'm forgiven, I don't have to work for salvation, and then I can freely serve this master.

And so I think it's good to try do it around something in you that Jesus has really changed or encouraged. So I think even if you have a boring testimony actually like I grew up as a pastor's kid, but I had this horrible sin of wanting to please people that I just need to get rid of.

[31 : 07] So it's not like exciting, but it's very real. So maybe that's also helpful. Try not to go for exciting, but just this is the real me with what I'm like, and Jesus accepts that and forgives that.

Awesome. And one more question just come up. Maybe for you, what's a practical way that you found helpful to gaze more deeply into the gospel? So I find it very helpful to write like in a journal as I'm reading God's word.

It helps kind of focus my mind and get me thinking and having ideas. That's been a big one. There's nothing like just slowly plodding along in God's word that he'll bring things up that he needs for you.

And then also just the encouragement of others to keep you honest and to keep sharing. And so I think that's a really important thing because sometimes you're a bit flat, right? And but if you're in the habit of having conversations, spiritual conversations with other people, then they can pick you up and you can catch a little bit of someone else's excitement as well.

That's that's great. Thanks so much for sharing that. Yeah, if we can all just share appreciation again. Thanks so much Pastor Sam. Thank you.