

Scripture Reading: Ephesians 2

“ And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, 2 in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, 3 among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others. 4 But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, 5 even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), 6 and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 9 not of works, lest anyone should boast. 10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”

''Being Alive in Christ''

This morning we will return to our study of the Apostle Paul's letter to the Saints at Ephesus. Entering chapter two we come to what I have often argued is the most concise statement about the Gospel, the Good News that God saves His people! Now I do have to make a bit of a pastoral confession, because even though I have had many weeks to get ready for this sermon, I have largely had what might be called writer's block! It was not the kind of writer's block that we often see in the movies, where the poor writer just cannot come up with anything to write about:

- Rather in this case I think I was overwhelmed by the importance of what would be taught here and wondered where to begin the task.

At bottom these simple truths have had a tremendous impact on my life and I have come to understand over the years just how significant they are for a rich Christian walk: Something we should all desire.

We are a reformed church, and this means that we hold to a conventual view of the Scriptures and to the Doctrines of Grace. [mention the PRAISE SHEET at the end]

At bottom, the Doctrines of Grace teach us that salvation is fully dependent on God's grace to give men and women new life. Apostle Paul will teach us in the weeks ahead, that mankind is dead in trespasses and sins and needs the saving work of God from start to finish.

This sadly stands in contrast with much of the modern teaching about salvation which many would call Arminianism: There the will of man is not fully fallen and is still capable of responding to God's offer of free grace.

- It is important to remember that both the reformer and the Arminian teach that the forgiveness of our sins is solely based on the work of Jesus on the Cross where He suffered the wrath God that should have fallen on us as sinners.

As reformers we affirm what the Apostle Paul clearly taught in chapter one of this Epistle: Those who were to be saved were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world, Jesus then came to save His people from their sins and finally the Holy Spirit applies this salvation to those chosen by the Father in Christ.

The Arminian would also say that God chose those who would be in Christ, but they believe this choice was made based on the decision that each person made, which God would only know as He looked down through history!

So, when we come to verse one of chapter two and Paul declares to the Saints “And you He made alive...” We have to decide whether such new life is the result of our actions or God’s actions...

There is a basic illustration of salvation used by the Arminians that can clearly illustrates this distinction: They present a patient who is terminally ill lying in his or her hospital bed.

Jesus then comes with the medicine of the Gospel, His death, burial & resurrection, and all the patient has to do is receive it with the empty hand of faith!

- That sounds reasonable and seems to be presenting a Gospel that is based on God’s grace since the sinner did not work to produce the medicine that he or she needed.

But, it only sounds reasonable until you add the next portion of verse one: “And you He made alive who were dead in trespasses and sins”

- Thus the proper Biblical or reformed illustration would have Jesus coming to a person in the hospital who has already died!

Now He must first give them new life, just as Jesus taught Nicodemus that one had to be born again, or how Jesus called on Lazarus to come forth, or remembering God’s promise that He would replace our hearts of stone with hearts of flesh.

Now we learned in chapter one that those with such new hearts are those who come to trust in Jesus & when we come to verse ten of this 2nd chapter we will see those same hearts walking in the good works that Jesus created! When we add what Paul teaches the Colossians, we see how a proper understanding of all this impacts ALL of our Christian walk:

Colossians 2:6 “As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, 7 rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving.”

Now we will be covering this again in the weeks to come but for this morning I wanted to share some of my personal history and to take us on a bit of a rabbit trail in the Gospel of John which played a large role in my early Christian walk.

There are two basic reasons that I became so convinced of the reformed doctrines of Grace...

The first comes from reflecting on my own personal conversion...

[give details]

The second and certainly more important reason came from my study of the Scriptures. And it is interesting that it came before I had any real knowledge of the reformed faith.

In fact, after my conversion I attended a Sunday school class taught by an Arminian teacher who made a very strong case for what he believed. As a young Christian I could not get enough of the Bible and in reading it I kept coming up against things that seemed to run counter to what this man taught.

I am sure I was a real pest with my many questions, but in the end the Epistles of Paul, especially Romans and Ephesians convinced me that the reformers were correct and when Linda and I finally ended up at Covenant Reformed Church here in Sacramento we still remember thinking, ‘so this is what we are.’

- With that said, this morning my rabbit trail will take us to the Gospel of John because it was his account that perhaps convinced me more then even the doctrinal arguments from the Apostle Paul.

The theme of God's saving love bringing us new life runs from the beginning to the end of John's Gospel account. While I want to quickly review chapter six, we need to remember that John had already taught that men come to faith by the will of God in Chapter one, that Jesus knew what was in the heart of man in chapter two and that men needed to be born again as He taught Nicodemus in John chapter three.

As Jesus confronts the religious leaders and those who followed Him for the show in chapter six, we see clearly the importance of understanding God's sovereign work in our lives...

Chapter six opens with the feeding of the five thousand and then Jesus walking on water as He and the disciples cross the sea. The next day the crowds go looking for Jesus. John 6: 25 And when they found Him on the other side of the sea, they said to Him, "Rabbi, when did You come here?" 26 Jesus answered them and said,

"Most assuredly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled. 27 Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him."

28 Then they said to Him, "What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?" 29 Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent."

- Now you can imagine that the Arminian teachers like to point to this verse to show why their simple illustration is so powerful & true!

But, here is why context is often so important because to use that illustration they must ignore what had already been taught in the early chapters AND what now follows:

30 "Therefore they said to Him,

"What sign will You perform then, that we may see it and believe You? What work will You do?"

31 Our fathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'"

Notice that these religious leaders put their decision at the forefront:

Show us a sign, or make the case and then we can decide if we want to believe: We should remember that some of these men may have been those standing at the foot of the cross mocking Jesus as He was crucified.

- Keep that in mind as we see how Jesus answers them:

32 "Then Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, Moses did not give you the bread from heaven, but My Father gives you the true bread from heaven. 33 For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."

34 Then they said to Him,

"Lord, give us this bread always." 35 And Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.

36 But I said to you that you have seen Me and yet do not believe. 37 All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out."

When Jesus says in verse 35, 'He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst...' those Arminians are again quick to list it as another proof text for their team...

- But what is actually taught here by Jesus is that only those that the Father has given to Jesus come to Jesus!

38 "For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. 39 This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day.

40 And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day.”

- Notice that God’s work in eternity past to lay out the plan of salvation for His chosen people does NOT exclude the means by which we come to Jesus!
- BUT again, the saving choice to trust in Jesus is made by those the Father gives to the Son and Jesus makes that very clear here in John chapter six:

41 “The Jews then complained about Him, because He said, “I am the bread which came down from heaven.” 42 And they said, “Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How is it then that He says, ‘I have come down from heaven’?”

43 Jesus therefore answered and said to them, “Do not murmur among yourselves. 44 No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day. 45 It is written in the prophets, ‘And they shall all be taught by God.’ Therefore everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me.”

Now I hope you can begin to see how difficult I made life for that poor Sunday School teacher when I kept reading this Gospel account and asking him why Jesus said things like, “44 No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him”?

Jesus then contrasts those who ate the mana and died with those who would partake of His flesh and blood as the true mana which we will consider at the Table this morning and then He completes this confrontation in verse 63:

“It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing.

The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life. 64 But there are some of you who do not believe.” For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who would betray Him. 65 And He said, “Therefore I have said to you that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father.”

66 From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more. 67 Then Jesus said to the twelve, “Do you also want to go away?”

68 But Simon Peter answered Him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. 69 Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” 70 Jesus answered them, “Did I not choose you, the twelve, and one of you is a devil?” 71 He spoke of Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon, for it was he who would betray Him, being one of the twelve.”

So why did I think this little rabbit trail was important?

It was NOT simply to give you the ammunition you need to win debates with Arminians.

It was not to imply that Arminians are in danger of hell fire: Whether a person who has made a sincere confession of faith in the work of Jesus does so realizing that God drew them in or thinking they made a good choice on their own, the choice is made & Jesus says He will lose NONE who are His.

My heart wants you all to better understand this grand truth because as I look back over some 45 years of walking with Christ, I see how important it is in our everyday walk.

The Apostle Paul will conclude his summary of the Gospel by saying that “we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.” Or as he said in Colossians we are to walk with Jesus in the same way that we first believed!

- **IF we believe that we came into the Kingdom by making good choices with our own free will, then we will in some way feel the burden to continue making good choices in our own strength.**

I can tell you from first hand experience [learned MANY times over] that we make much better choices when we remember that it is always God Who leads us to those better choices, just as He led us into eternal life in the first place!

- **This understanding keeps us in God's Word, it keeps us in close fellowship with His people and it keeps us on our knees!**

When we do sin or make bad decisions it allows us to honestly repent and know that we have not somehow ruined God's grand plan for our lives.

Most of all it gives us that precious gift of contentment: Not always wondering if we need to do better to be closer to God, but always learning to rest in His arms.

As the Apostle Paul taught young Timothy in the sixth chapter of his first letter to him, "6 Now godliness with contentment is great gain.

7 For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. 8 And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content.

Or again at Hebrews 13:5 "Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

And finally it gives us the ability to truly embrace that wise teaching the Apostle gave to the Saints at Philippi:

Philippians 4:4 "Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice! 5 Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand.

6 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; 7 and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

Communion Meditation: John 6

"47 Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life. 48 I am the bread of life. 49 Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and are dead.

50 This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die. 51 I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world."

God-Centered Salvation & Evangelism

[Presented as an alternative to the traditional TULIP]

"But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast."

Ephesians 2:4-9

P

Plight of Mankind

A Reality

In the Garden of Eden, God gave Adam a real choice with real consequences: Eternal life with God or death. His wrong choice left mankind "dead in their trespasses and sins." Without God, man's estate was truly hopeless with "none that seek after righteousness, no not one." By understanding the truly bad news we can then see the need for the True Savior. *Scripture: Gen 1-3; Romans 1-3; Titus 3:3-8; Galatians 3:21-23; Jerimiah 17:9*

R

Resolve of Our Triune God

A Mystery

God's eternal plan is to demonstrate his great mercy and love through the salvation of His saints and His justice with the punishment of the wicked. While a full understanding of God's purposes is beyond our understanding, we do see the end of the matter, "For of Him and through Him, and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever.- Amen." *Scripture: Ephesians 1:1-14; II Corinthians 1:3-11; Romans 9; 11:25-36; Colossians 3; Isaiah 53 & 55*

A

Applying the Work of Jesus

A Wonder

God could not "wink" at sin, but had to maintain His justice while justifying those chosen to be saved. To accomplish this work of salvation, God the Son became flesh "to save His people from their sin." He lived a perfect life; took the punishment of our sins on the cross, was raised in power. He now sits at the right hand of God the Father as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. *Scripture Matthew 1:21; John 17; Romans 1:3-7 & 3:21-4:25; I Corinthians 1:1-11; I I Corinthians 5:21; Philippians 2:1-11; Colossians 1:14-22; the Book of Hebrews*

I

Inclusion Through the Holy Spirit

A Mission

God the Holy Spirit provides the gift of faith & new hearts for God's people, giving us the power to repent of our sins, live lives of obedience and to be protected in this life from the devil, the world and our own flesh. It is in the Book of Acts where we learn about His great work where He unites God's people to Christ, as the earth is filled with the Kingdom of Jesus. *Scripture: The Book of Acts; John 3:1-21; Galatians 5; Ephesians 2:1-10*

S

Secure in the Hand of God

A Blessing

Just as we were not able to save ourselves from sin, we cannot live the Christian life without the power and protection of our God. "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God has before ordained that we should walk in them." We are secure in the hands of our loving God. *Scripture: John 6:31-65; John 10:1-42 & 14:15-31; Romans 8; 12-1-2; I Corinthians 1:1-9; Philippians 1:3-10; Colossians 2:6-10; I Peter 1 & 2*

E

Extending the Kingdom

A Calling

As thankful children of God, we are to be those beautiful feet that preach the Gospel of Peace and bring glad tidings to all the nations of the earth, baptizing them in the Name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them all the commands of Jesus! We evangelize, and our evangelism will be successful in extending the kingdom of Jesus, because our sovereign God does the electing, applying, including, and preserving.

Scripture: Genesis 12:2-3; Matthew 28:18-20; Romans 10:6-21; I Corinthians 15:20-28; Colossians 4:2-6; I Timothy 2:1-8

** References to God's praise occur over one hundred times in the Book of Psalms alone!*