

*But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us,⁵ even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—
(Ephesians 2:4-5 ESV)*

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. (Ephesians 2:10 ESV)

Who Are You?

May 7th, 2023

Ephesians 2:1-10

Rev. Levi denBok

Introduction:

Good morning!

I had the privilege of travelling with John Atkinson this past week to visit our mission partners in Newfoundland. We are looking forward to sharing a report of what we saw in the coming weeks. I returned on Wednesday morning and attempted to jump back into our series in Acts, but I couldn't shake a pull to rather turn instead to Ephesians 2. I preached on this passage at the men's conference a few weeks ago, and I would like to return to it this morning. To that end, please turn with me in your Bibles to Ephesians 2.

While you're turning there, I want to ask you a question: Who are you?

We answer that question differently in different contexts, don't we? In social settings, we might attach our identity to our career. "I'm a therapist." "I'm a carpenter."

In private settings, we might home in a bit closer. "I'm a mom." Or: "I'm Amanda's husband."

But, how do you answer that question when you're lying in bed at night, alone with your thoughts? That's a time when the our truest answer to the question begins to bubble up, isn't it? "I'm a failure. I'm a disappointment. I'm just like my mother. I'm an addict. I'm unhappy. I'm unfulfilled. I'm lost."

So, I ask again this morning: Who are you?

The way that you answer that question will shape everything about you. Which is why, in our passage this morning, the Apostle Paul is determined to make sure that we answer that question correctly.

Look with me now to Ephesians 2. We're going to be reading verses 1-10. Hear now God's holy, inspired, inerrant, living and active word to us this evening.

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins ² in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— ³ among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. ⁴ But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— ⁶ and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷ so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. ⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰ For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. (Ephesians 2:1-10 ESV)

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

This morning, we're going to break this passage down to three simple sections: Who we were. What God did. Can you follow that with me?

Good. Let's jump in. In verses 1-3, we discover:

Who We Were

The Apostle Paul knows that we will never understand grace and we will never live the life we were made to live until we REALLY SEE who we were.

Who were you before God saved you? Paul writes:

And you were **dead** (Ephesians 2:1a ESV)

Not sick. Not searching. Not sleeping. You were DEAD in your trespasses and sins.

And so was I. And so is everyone until they have been brought to life through faith in Christ.

If your theological system – if your approach to the Bible – doesn't allow you to say "AMEN" to that, then you need a new system! *Everything* that follows in our passage this evening is built on this foundation: You. Were. Dead.

The gospel is a MIRACLE – not because it makes bad men good, or misguided men focused, or sick men healthy – no, the gospel is a miracle because it makes DEAD MEN COME TO LIFE! Can you say "AMEN" to that?

Amen. Now, look again at verse 1:

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins ² **in which you once walked, following the course of this world** (Ephesians 2:1-2a ESV)

So, we were DEAD, Paul says. And yet, we were walking. Do you remember when you were a dead man walking? Do you remember when you were following the course of this world?

The world told us that money and success would give us happiness, so we lived our lives in a constant pursuit of more, but it was never enough, was it?

The world told us that unbridled sexual freedom would give us happiness, so we gave ourselves to one-night-stands, and casual relationships, and pornography binging, but it was never enough.

The world told us that leisure and comfort would give us happiness, so we spent our days sitting on the couch, staring at a screen, stuffing our faces with Doritos, but it was never enough.

We filled our garages with toys, but it was never enough.

We amassed our social media followers and presented our best face to the world, but it was never enough.

We lived for the weekend, but it was never enough.

We placed our hope in our children and tried to live vicariously through them, but it was never enough.

The world simply COULD NOT satisfy our deepest longings! It was slavery disguised as freedom! Because the world is animated by our spiritual enemy. Look again at verses 2-3:

following the course of this world, **following the prince of the power of the air**, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—³ among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. (Ephesians 2:2-3 ESV)

As we followed the world, we were really following the prince of the power of the air – that is, the devil. HE was the one who had us running in circles! HE was the one who kept deceiving us with empty promises. HE was the one who enslaved us.

The devil is effective because He understands that people do what they WANT to do. He saw our passions and lusts and desires, and he used them to enslave us.

We were selfish and sinful, and Paul concludes:

and were by nature **children of wrath**, like the rest of mankind. (Ephesians 2:3b ESV)

When we were dead in our sin, God's perfect and righteous wrath was directed at us – and rightfully so. Apart from Christ, we stood on the brink of an eternity in hell, and we didn't even care.

That's who we were.

But our story doesn't end there, does it? Look at the first two words of verse 4.

BUT GOD!

BUT GOD saw us in our sin. He saw that we had rejected Him. He saw that we were following the world. He saw that we were slaves to the devil. He saw that we were captives to our sinful desires. He saw, and He had every right to leave us there in the mess that we had made for ourselves. He had every right to give us over to our sinful rebellion and to sentence us to hell.

BUT GOD! He had a different plan for us, didn't He? In the next section, we discover:

What God Did

Look with me again at verses 4-5:

But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our trespasses, **made us alive together with Christ**—by grace you have been saved— (Ephesians 2:4-5 ESV)

God saw us in our spiritual death, and He made us alive **together with Christ**. Because there can be no life apart from Christ. Jesus said:

I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. (John 14:6 ESV)

We can't resuscitate ourselves. We can't work our way back to life. God must do it – and He does it by uniting us with Christ.

This, by the way, is what we declare in baptism.

The old me did not undergo a renovation – he did not receive some modifications and upgrades. No, the old me was an object of wrath because the old me was DEAD in sin! Therefore, the old me was BURIED with Christ.

But then, I was RAISED with Christ! I am now a new creation! Jesus lived the life that I could not live! He obeyed perfectly! He loved perfectly! He unlocked the blessings of God, and now all the

promises of God are “yes” and “amen” in Him! Now, in this profound and mysterious display of love and mercy, sinners like you and me have been clothed in the righteousness of Christ!

And how did this happen? Look again at verses 8-9:

For **by grace** you have been saved **through faith**. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9 ESV)

By grace. You need to understand this morning that salvation is not given to the people who deserve it. And that is GREAT news, because NONE OF US deserves it! That’s the point! That’s why we call it grace! One commentator defines grace this way:

It is unmerited favour - the love of God going out toward the utterly undeserving.¹

If there is any part of you that looks to the cross and sees Christ crucified for your sins and declares, “I DESERVE this gift!” then you are deceived. You are spiritually dead.

Hear this loud and clear: You DO NOT deserve this gift! Neither do I! Neither does ANYONE!

We do not deserve grace. BUT GOD! God in His love and kindness picked us up out of the muck of our sin and rebelling and placed our feet firmly on the solid rock that is Christ. By GRACE you have been saved!

Through faith.

If you are in Christ, then there came a moment when God picked you up out of your spiritual death and brought you to life. He opened your eyes, and you saw the zombie life that you had been living. He opened your mind to understand for the first time what Jesus actually accomplished in his life, death and resurrection. And then, He called you to receive that grace *through* faith.

¹ R. Kent Hughes, *Ephesians - The Mystery Of The Body Of Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1990), 75.

At this point, the part of you that always wants to steal back a bit of glory wants to declare, “AHA! So, God didn’t do ALL of it! **I** was the one who responded in faith! That was **ME!**” But look at what Paul goes on to say:

And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God (Ephesians 2:8b ESV)

The whole point of this passage – Paul’s main emphasis – is the glorious, mysterious, SCANDALOUS reality that GOD did this! We were dead! We were objects of wrath! But now we’re alive! Paul concludes:

not a result of works, **so that no one may boast.** (Ephesians 2:9 ESV)

“Aha!” You say, “Not a result of *works* but certainly a result of my *choice to believe!*” NO! That is to miss the point entirely! It is a MIRACLE that you believe! It is a MIRACLE that you responded to God in faith! Every single Christian in this room is a walking, talking, MONUMENT of MERCY! THAT is the argument of this passage. And it brings us to our conclusion.

Paul has reminded us of who we were, and he has celebrated what God did, but to what end? Why has Paul spent so much time unpacking all of this? Because he wants us to understand who we are.

Who We Are

Look at again at verse 6. Paul tells us here that God:

raised us up with him and **seated** us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 2:6 ESV)

I suspect that most of us have never really read this verse carefully. Look closely. “RAISED” us up and “SEATED” us with him in the heavenly places. Those verbs are in the past tense. Paul didn’t write that God “will eventually raise us up with him.” No, if you are a Christian – if you have confessed your sin and placed your trust in Jesus – then this has already happened! You WERE dead, but now you have been raised with Christ and, according to the Apostle Paul, you are seated with him NOW in the heavenly places! Did you know that?

We see this same glorious reality in Romans 8. There, Paul writes:

For those whom he **foreknew** he also **predestined** to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.³⁰ And those whom he **predestined** he also **called**, and those whom he **called** he also **justified**, and those whom he **justified** he also **glorified**. (Romans 8:29-30 ESV)

Even though you are still engaged in a spiritual fight – even though you are still putting sin to death and pressing forward in your walk – there is a very real sense in which you are right now REIGNING with Christ! You’re fighting a battle – that’s true – but it is a battle that HE HAS ALREADY WON! Paul wrote to the Philippians:

And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. (Philippians 1:6 ESV)

Therefore, as one commentator writes:

Although not yet there physically, we Christians are already in the heavenlies by virtue of our union with Christ. **Spiritually we are seated on the throne** along with other believers.²

Do you understand that? You were dead. But now you live! You were an object of wrath. But now YOU REIGN WITH CHRIST!

This is a bigger plot twist than any story that Hollywood has ever written, but this isn’t simply a fairytale. This is your life. This is true of you today. This is WHO YOU ARE!

C. S. Lewis in his famous book *The Weight of Glory* argues that if we could fully see who we are in Christ and who we will be in glory *we would be tempted to WORSHIP ourselves!*

Many of you are living with a self-assessment that is far too small. Many of you are attempting to wear nametags that don’t belong to you anymore.

² R. Kent Hughes, *Ephesians - The Mystery Of The Body Of Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1990), 69.

Brother. Sister. You are a Child of God! You are an eternal being! You are an heir to the throne! You are going to judge angels! You are going to reign and rule under God and over everything else. The GLORY of GOD is even now shining through that jar of clay that you're living in.

If you are in Christ, then THAT is who you are!

When we lose sight of this reality, we rob God of glory. In the Greek text, verses 1-7 actually form one massive, theologically dense statement. In that massive statement, Paul explains that we were dead in sin, but that we have been made alive in Christ, and then he roots that statement in a purpose clause. Look at the first verses of verse 7. "SO THAT." Those are *purpose* words. God brings dead sinners like you and me to life through Christ:

so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. (Ephesians 2:7 ESV)

God lavished mercy on me – mercy that I could never deserve – mercy that I IN NO WAY earned – SO THAT in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of His grace. You and I will forever be walking, talking monuments of the mercy of God! Stop and think about that for a moment.

God is going to lavish the riches of His grace and kindness on you forever and all the saints and all the angels will say, "Wow! Look at how loving, and merciful, and gracious our God is!"

That's your future!

And, in verse 10, Paul reminds us that our purpose of bringing glory to God isn't reserved for the coming ages. It begins now. Look at verse 10 one last time:

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. (Ephesians 2:10 ESV)

So, not only are we monuments of mercy, but we are also conduits of blessing. God's plan is send His blessings into the world *through* us! We are His workmanship. Created for good works.

In light of that, let me ask you a question: Are you living like who you *were*? Or are you living like who you ARE?

Listen, if you are in Christ, then you're going to need to let go of some of those old familiar lies.

You are not a failure. You are not a loser. You are not a porn addict. You are not a negligent father. You are not unusable. You are not disqualified. You are not a mistake.

You are united with Christ – an heir to the throne. You are a blood-bought child of God.

God has given you your identity.

You are not a self-made man! You are a God-made man! You are His workmanship – brought from death to newness of life to live to His glory and grace! And there is no greater calling in the world!

So, let me ask you one more time: Who are you?

Don't waste another second of your life living like who you were. By grace, through faith, step into who He has made you and saved you to be. Live like who you are. To that end, let's pray together.