

DEATH TO LIFE

A SERMON

DELIVERED ON THE SABBATH MORNING OF OCTOBER 24TH, 2021 BY

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In a recent poll carried out by the Culture Research Center and Probe Ministries, 75% of so called evangelical Christians believe that people are basically good, 48% believe being a good person leads to salvation, and 35% believe there are multiple paths that lead to God. I disagree, and what's more important is the apostle Paul disagrees too. As we look at our text this morning we'll discover that in fact man is inherently evil. That Jesus is the only way to Heaven. And being good is never good enough. Only through God's amazing grace can we receive salvation.

Ephesians chapter 2 says,

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins 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—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. But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. 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

Our passage this morning breaks down into three main sections. Death, Verses 1 - 3, Which looks at what we were like before we were saved. Life, Verses 4 - 9, Which looks at what God has done for us. Purpose, Verses 10, Which looks at our new life in Christ.

Before we get into the text, let's remind ourselves of what's happened so far. The letter to the Ephesians was written by the Apostle Paul while he was in prison in Rome. Paul had previously spent three years with the church during his third missionary journey, and this letter was written about 6 - 8 years after he had moved on. In the first chapter Paul has reminded us that we have been predestined, according to God's will. We have been adopted as his children, and have received redemption through Christ's death. We have obtained an inheritance, and we have been given The Holy Spirit as our guarantee of salvation. Also that Jesus was raised from the dead and seated in the heavenly places. That God has put all things under His' feet and made Christ head over the church. Now Paul is about to double-back and remind us again of His amazing grace.

Our first point is looking at verses 1 - 3 which we'll call 'Death'. And you were dead in the trespasses and sins 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—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: 1-3). So let's not try and sugar coat this. This is really bad news. And to be honest, it's also pretty offensive.

Paul informs us that we were dead in our trespasses and sins in which we once walked. It's interesting that Paul uses the words 'trespasses' and 'sins', and in doing so he trying to help us understand our fall state better. 'Trespasses' means going against specific Bible 'commands', like 'you shall not kill', or 'you shall not commit adultery'. So if you kill someone, for instance, you have trespassed against that command. Where as the word 'sins', means the evil things we do, motivated by our sinful nature. And these acts may not be explicitly written as biblical commands. For instance the bible doesn't say anything about watching pornography but clearly its sinful, evil and totally against God's role for men and women. So when Paul talks about us being dead in trespasses and sins, he means we are walking away from God, and living life our own way. We are basically putting ourselves before God. And therefore make ourselves idols for self worship. In the Old Testament, God commands us to have no other gods before Him. Be in our fallen state we are shouting back at God, "No! I am first, I am most important, my way, my desires, my pleasures, all for my glory!" So despite what 75% of people think, we are not inherently good.

Now I know that for anyone who isn't a Christian, and maybe some who are, this is offensive. You're probably thinking, "I didn't come to church to hear this!" "And I'm pretty sure I'm not dead like you're telling me." So before we go too much further lets just be clear what I'm not saying. I'm not saying that we were 'physically dead', like some crazed George Romero zombie movie, or The Walking Dead TV show. And a far as I know, the Zombie Apocalypse hasn't started yet, so I'm in the clear on that one. And I'm also not saying we were 'morally dead'. I have many friends and family members who are not Christians but are good, moral, loving people. However the Bible is saying we were 'spiritually dead' - dead to God. So then you may ask, "So, at what point did we become dead?" Paul says in Romans 5: 12, Just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned.

So we did not become spiritually dead at a certain time, we were born spiritually dead. After God created mankind He give him only one rule, not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Our sin was inherit from Adam. Adam choose to disobey God and his sinfulness was credited to us. As we are descendants of Adam we inherit his sinful nature and are therefore born sinners. Pastor and theologian R. C. Sproul said, "We're not sinners because we sin. We sin because we're sinners." In the Old Testament David understood this when he wrote Psalm 51: 3 For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight... Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.

As we turning back to Ephesians, Paul continues, ...you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, (Ephesians 2: 2). All of us were following the course of this world, this present age. Look around at the lies this world is selling us. God's authority means nothing to the world, thinks it knows best. But look a little bit closer and you'll see the world is in chaos. This chaos is what we were following before we came to know God. The only reason we didn't notice what was going on was because we were spiritually dead. Paul continues in his letter in an even stronger way. He says, We were following the 'prince of the power of the air'. There is little doubt as you read the commentaries that the 'prince' or 'ruler of the air' is satan, the Father of Lies. Ephesians 6: 12 says, For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. satan is a liar and deceiver. He hates God and will do all he can to keep you from coming to know Him. He whispers lies in your ear like, "You don't need to commit to each other in marriage, just enjoy living together and if you get bored just leave the other person." Or "Just enjoy sex with who ever you want, don't worry about the consequences, if you get pregnant you can always abort the baby, it's not a really person anyway." Or "God may have made you in His image, but if that doesn't suit you just become whatever you want, you won't regret it later."

The devil promises happiness but his lies will only bring pain, destruction and broken lives. Stop! Look around you. Are you heading toward God or filling the course of this world. satan's plan is always to keep us from following God. Both before we were saved and after. Do not fall into his trap. What he is promising is not better than what God has in store for you. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 4: 4...the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. His whispers of happiness are just empty promises designed to confuse us and draw us away from God amazing grace for our lives.

Back in Ephesians Paul isn't finished with the bad news yet. In verse 3 we read,...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. Before we were saved our lives were characterized by the passions of the flesh, as we carried out the desires of the body and the mind. The word 'flesh' here does not just mean 'physical bodies' but our whole being and nature. Our fleshly desires are lived out through our selfish ambitions, such as Greed, Pleasures, Hatred, Disunity, Anger, Addiction, and Rebellion. In the end Paul simply refers to us as, 'Children of Wrath'. And if you're here today, having to put your trust in Jesus, this is you. You are in a bad fix, just like all of us once were. As unbelievers we were held captive by 'The World', 'The Flesh' and 'The Devil'. And left to our own devices we cannot break. The world is looking to bind us. The devil is looking to lie to and deceive us. And the lusts of our flesh will eventually destroy us. We are powerless to come to God. Powerless to call for help. We were helpless, spiritually dead and ensnared by all that is around us. But God doesn't leave us there.

In our second point, we see God's amazing rescue as he bring us from death to life. In verse 4 to 9 we read But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

Look at all that God has done for us, God shows his rich mercy to us. God has great love for us. God made us alive together with Christ. God saved us. God raised us up. God seated us in the heavenly places. But there's more. Back in chapter 1 we see, God has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing. God chose us in him before the foundation of the world. God predestined us for adoption. God made known the mystery of his will. God gave us an inheritance. God sealed us with the Holy Spirit. Even when we were rebelling and walking away from God, He loved us and came after us. When we had nothing to offer Him, He gave us His only son.

Listen to the wise words of Mr. Spurgeon...

One week-night, when I was sitting in the house of God, I was not thinking much about the preacher's sermon, for I did not believe it. The thought struck me, "How did you come to be a Christian?" I sought the Lord. "But how did you come to seek the Lord?" The truth flashed across my mind in a moment I should not have sought Him unless there had been some previous influence in my mind to make me seek Him. I prayed, thought I, but then I asked myself, How came I to pray? I was inspired to pray by reading the Scriptures. How came I to read the Scriptures? I did read them, but what led me to do so? Then, in a moment, I saw that God was at the bottom of it all, and that He was the Author of my faith. I ascribe my change wholly to God.

Spurgeon knew that everything was due to God through the Spirit's illumination of truth.

Back in Ephesians 1, Paul tells us in verses 4, 5 and 11, [God] has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world. (Ephesians 1:4). In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will (Ephesians 1:5). In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will... (Ephesians 1:11). Here we are reminded of God's great love for us. How He chose us before the foundation of the world. How He predestined us for adoption to Himself. How He gave us an inheritance. And now in verse 4 and 5 of chapter 2 Paul again reminds us of God's great love for us but God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses made us alive together with Christ. (Ephesians 2:4 - 5). This is a real miracle - that we were once dead and then through the power of The Holy Spirit, made alive. When God makes us alive we no longer walk in step with the world, but we keep in step with the Spirit. When God makes us alive the devil is no longer our master, we are bought with a price, and are now in Christ. We are no longer sons of disobedience, but sons and daughters of the King. Our lives turn from despair to hope. Empty lies are replaced by promises. And we no longer care for the riches of the world, because we have the riches of Christ. Our imperishable inheritance.

Then, as if Paul stops mid thought, he reminds us again that by grace, simply meaning the free and unmerited love and favour of God. Been saved, refers to you and I in our regenerated, born again state. But saved from what? Saved from the wrath of God. John 3:36 says, Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him. So we are saved by God from God's wrath. God saved us from Himself. However the punishment of our sin still needs to be paid for, otherwise God is not a just God. Listen to the words of Peter who helps us understand what happened, He himself [Jesus] bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. (1 Peter 2:24–25). So Jesus, God's own son, took our sin upon himself when He died on the cross. He took the punishment, Gods wrath, on our behalf. And then after three days, God raised Him from the dead, showing that He has defeated the final enemy, death itself. And because Christ was raised, we too will be raised on that last day when Christ returns. This is the very heart of the gospel. Paul tells us in Romans 10: 9 ...if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. This is the most amazing news you will ever hear.

But Paul has even more for us, even more blessings, in verse 6 he writes, but God .. made us alive together with Christ .. and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus... We have been seated in the Heavenly places in Christ Jesus. When God look at us he see Jesus, and so in some way we are already with Christ in the Heavenly places. Our salvation is secure because we are in Christ. And we are 'sealed by the promised Holy Spirit who is our guarantee'. There is nothing we can do which will cause God to stop loving us. There is no sin which God can't forgive. Nothing you have ever done is beyond the forgiveness of God. The blood of Christ has covered every sin, past, present and future. As Paul says in Romans 8: 38, For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Paul goes on, saying in verse 7, so that in the coming ages he [God] might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. When Paul talked about this coming ages he's thinking about about 'eternity'. Our sins are finite and can be written down. But Gods grace is immeasurable. And God will use eternity to show us this immeasurable grace. Once we get to Heaven, grace doesn't stop, it just keeps on going!

Finally Paul finishes this section by again reminding us about His grace. Verse 8 says, For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. Paul reminds us again there is nothing we can do to add to what Christ has already done for us. Being a good person, doing good things, Living a good life will not save us. We are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, by Christ alone. And all of this so that none may boast. It is all by grace! Martin Luther, one of the central figures of the Protestant Reformation said it so well. The only contribution we make to our salvation is the sin which God so graciously forgives.

In our third and last point is looking at verse 10 which we'll call 'Purpose'. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. We are God's own creation. Not evolved through random change, but created in His image. We have been created for good works which God prepared in advance for us. And it is these good works that we are to walk in. These works don't secure our salvation but are the fruit of what has already been done for us. They are our new way of life.

So as we begin to wrap this up, how do we apply this to our lives? Firstly and most importantly, if you've never put your trust in Jesus and asked him to save you, now is the time. You don't know what tomorrow will bring. Today, turn away from your sin and the world, and trust in Jesus. Second, for all of us who are saved, get out there and share the gospel. People are going to hell and the only way they are going to hear the good news, the gospel, is if someone - like you or I - tells them. And Finally, worship. This is the most amazing news you will ever hear. Nothing in life is better than this. We were dead and now we are alive. Because of God's amazing grace we have a hope and a future. Let us praise and worship Him!