

Ephesians 2:1-10
Being Made Alive

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As a church, we are working our way through the book of Ephesians. We began our study in July by considering what Paul wrote in the first half of chapter one. Paul tells us the purpose of the church, the purpose of the Christian life both now and in eternity. Paul tells us why God chooses, destines and blesses us. Paul tells us why God bestows his grace on us and lavishes us with grace. Paul tells us why God has made known to us the mystery of his will and put all things in heaven and on earth together. God does all these things – chooses, destines, blesses, bestows grace, lavishes grace, reveals the mystery of his will, and brings together all things in heaven and on earth – God does all this for the praise of his glory. The church exists to glorify God – to reveal the divine essence and nature of God. The purpose of the Christian life is to honour and display God. Paul doesn't tell us that God chooses, destines and blesses us so we can be saved from our sins. Paul doesn't tell us that God reveals the mystery of his will and brings together all things in heaven and on earth so we can have eternal life. Rather, God does all these so God can be revealed, worshipped, made known, honoured, and glorified. In other words, the purpose of our salvation, the primary purpose of Jesus' life and ministry, his death and resurrection is not for our going to heaven, or our having eternal life, or our 'being saved'. The purpose of the Church, the goal of our salvation, the primary purpose of Jesus' life and ministry, his death and resurrection is to glorify God – to reveal and demonstrate the essence of God.

Then last week as we continued studying Ephesians, we learned what Paul prays for the church and for the Christian life. Since the goal and purpose of the church is to glorify God, Paul prays that we would know God better. Christian discipleship begins with a growing knowledge of God. Specifically, Paul prays that we would know the hope of God's call, know our inheritance in Christ (which is to say the heavens and earth coming together), and know God's power. God's

power is most clearly demonstrated in and through Jesus Christ. God's power raised Jesus from the dead. God's power seated Jesus at the right hand of the Father in the heavenly realms. God's power placed all things in heaven and earth under Jesus' feet. God's power appointed Jesus to be head over everything. So that the church can fulfill our primary calling to glorify God, we must know God. We know God by knowing God's call, knowing our inheritance in Christ, and knowing God's power.

This morning we continue in the book of Ephesians by looking at the first part of chapter 2. I know these first few weeks in the book of Ephesians include a lot of theology – a lot of teaching about God. Paul lays the theological groundwork at the beginning of Ephesians and then later in the letter he gets into some more practical matters. So this morning we will continue to focus our attention on God: His action, His power, His being.

The first 10 verses of chapter 2 paint a vivid contrast between life with God and life without God. Most people in life believe they're on the right path, that they're heading in the right direction. They've got a plan and they're going somewhere. In fact, within the Christian community it's common to think that the desires and dreams that are so deep within us are given to us by God. So we set out to follow our hearts, our passions, and our dreams. Yet these deep desires and dreams can sometimes result in problems and disaster. This is what Paul talks about in the first three verses of this passage: "being 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.”

Following whatever our desires are can quite possibly lead towards ruin and disaster.

So why would someone go in the wrong direction, towards disaster and death? Paul identifies three reasons: the world, the ruler of the kingdom of the air, and the flesh. These three influence our decisions and behaviour.

First, Paul identifies the world as one way that pushes us in the wrong direction – away from life. The world is defined as human society which organizes itself without God. The Biblical usage of world is human society which orders itself without God’s rule or God’s presence. The world then is in contrast to God’s Kingdom where human society organizes and orders itself with God at the centre. You can see how the world might push us in the wrong direction because instead of pushing us towards God, the world rejects God and pushes us towards self: towards what we want. We experience this push towards self through media, through culture, through relationships with those around us. Now, the world in which we presently live is not the way God intended the world to be. The world right now organizes itself without God; but the new heavens and new earth will order itself with God at the centre. So one way we are pushed in the wrong direction is from the world because the world does not recognize God’s rule or power or presence.

The second reason we go in the wrong direction (sin/transgression) is because of the ruler of the power of the air. This is in reference to the principalities and powers that operate in the invisible

unseen world. The Bible makes it clear that there is an active, living, powerful unseen dark and evil power. Though invisible to us, we can often sense its presence.

Lastly, the third reason we go in the wrong direction is because of our flesh. The flesh refers to the self-centered human nature. We have desires and make decisions that centre and elevate self, rather than God. It is human nature to focus on self.

As I mentioned earlier, most people believe they're on the right path and heading the right way. It is hard to see how we're heading down the wrong path, especially because of the forces all around us which compel us in that direction: the world, the power of the air, and the flesh. We go down the wrong path, we sin and transgress, when we don't put God at the centre.

So if habitual human thought and behaviour leads to death, how can we be rescued from this death, from going the wrong way? It is common for us, in the Western world, to give a Western evangelical response. We might say something like this: salvation is about the forgiveness of our sins. Yet in reading and studying this particular passage, I want to suggest to you this morning that what it means to be rescued from death is actually part of something much much bigger and part of a larger vision of God. Salvation is far more than forgiveness of sins.

As we worked our way through Ephesians 1, we began to understand what that something bigger is. Paul first alludes to it in verse 10: to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under

one head. Paul mentions it again in his prayer that the church would know the riches of his glorious inheritance and that the church would know God's power when God's power placed all things under the feet of Jesus and God's power appointed Jesus the head. Our glorious inheritance in Christ is the inheritance of the heavens and earth coming together, the inheritance of new creation, the inheritance of creation being redeemed, restored, renewed, set free. And so in this context where Paul speaks of salvation from death, where Paul speaks of being rescued from death, the bigger picture is of course the heavens and earth coming together, the bigger picture is the new creation. After all, the image Paul paints is life out of death. Listen to his language: you were dead, you used to live, all of us also lived, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead.

The pivotal change happens in verse 4. Verse 4 is the start of telling us about this rescue. And it begins "but God". Paul is here grabbing our attention and putting it rightly on God, on God's acting, on God's doing, on God's being. Paul tells us: *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.* In the original Greek, this starts "But God" not "But because of his great love"; rather "But God being rich in mercy". And what does God do? But God made us alive in Christ. This means that when God revealed himself in Jesus the Messiah, when we beheld the glory of God in Jesus, God in Jesus Christ also revealed for us what true, genuine, full human life is all about. We experience the fullness of life when we believe in the crucified and risen Jesus as Lord and Saviour and live the way he taught us.

In fact, in the original Greek, the first verb in chapter 2 appears in verse 5. God *made us alive* in Christ. The emphasis is on life, not forgiveness of sins, not repentance, but life. God provides a way from death to life. The bigger picture that includes forgiveness of sins but is so much more than that is that we are made alive in Jesus. This new kind of life has been achieved through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And so in Jesus Christ we come to understand what it means to be truly human, what it means to be created good and in the image of God, what it means to live a full and genuine human life.

Being made alive in Jesus Christ means we belong to Jesus. And those who belong to Jesus are in him so what is true of Jesus is true of those who belong to him. That is why Paul can then write that God has raised Jesus up and God has raised us up in Christ. God has seated Jesus in the heavenly realms and God has seated us with him in Christ.

What makes Christians distinct is not a set of moral codes and standards; not a set of rules and regulations; not a defined set of songs we sing or words we pray. What makes Christians distinct is that we belong to Christ. We are in Christ. So by virtue of our belonging to Christ, by virtue of our union with Christ, we share in his resurrection, in his ascension, and in his session (being seated with God).

Set within this bigger picture and this bigger vision, we come to understand a different vision of salvation. Salvation is not just about the forgiveness of sins. We know from earlier on that our Christian purpose is to glorify God. We know that God's power is seen in and through Jesus

Christ. And we know that God has used His same power to save us, to raise us up with Christ and to seat us with him in Christ. Salvation is glory, it is forgiveness, it is about being made alive, it is about belonging to Jesus and sharing in his resurrection and ascension.

What does it mean for us to be raised up with Christ and seated with him in Christ? If we consider what it means for Christ to be raised from the dead and seated with the Father, we know that it means that Jesus Christ is reigning as King over the world. Paul writes earlier in this letter, “that power – speaking of God’s power – is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but in the age to come.” To be raised up with Christ and to be seated with God in the heavenly realms in Christ is not about passivity. It is about reigning, about taking action, about activity.

So what are we reigning over? Well, consider again the bigger vision and narrative. Consider again our inheritance in Christ. The new heavens and the new earth. All things in heaven and on earth come together in Christ. And so our reigning with Christ is about reigning over the new heavens and new earth. Our reigning with Christ under God is reigning over the new creation.

How do we reign over the new creation, the new heavens and new earth? Since we are reigning with and in Christ Jesus, it means we reign in the same way in which Jesus Christ reigns. The model of Christ, as we see in his life and ministry on earth, is one of service: Jesus Christ came

not to be served but to serve. Jesus' gospel message he proclaimed was: "repent, for the Kingdom of God is near". So in Jesus' living and ministering we see Jesus bringing God's Kingdom into this world. We see Jesus bringing God's wise and gracious rule into this world. We reign over the new creation as we live in holiness, righteousness, service. And when we reign, we glorify God – we reveal the essence of God.

Notice this has all already begun. Paul does not write this in the future tense, he does not say: But God will make us alive with Christ; or But God will raise us up with Christ; or But God will seat us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus. Paul says this has all already been accomplished. God has made us alive with Christ: But God raised us up with Christ; but God seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus.

So we have this image of God raising us up from the dead, of God seating us with him in Christ Jesus. This means that we are living a new kind of life. Our new life, our being a new creation, is defined by Jesus' resurrection and is different from the life that we've been used to. Following Jesus's resurrection life is different from following the ways of the world. For in following the resurrection life, we are following the life where we are born anew, we are a new creation, we are fully and truly human. That is because resurrection makes alive what was dead.

The last few verses of this passage, verses 8-10, speak about God's grace. These verses are a summary of Romans 2 and 3. Grace is more than our life being enriched, being made better, being enhanced. Grace is about giving life where there was death.

Now verse 8 can be a bit confusing – for it is by grace you have been saved, through faith. To be saved by grace is different from being justified by faith. These two words: salvation and justification, are big theological words that can be hard to understand. Justification is about belonging to God’s family; about people being part of God’s family. Justification explains how we belong to God. Salvation is about people being rescued. So salvation explains how we are rescued and who is responsible for the rescue.

The Bible is clear that we are justified by faith. This means that faith is what identifies someone as belonging to God. To have faith is to mark someone as belonging to God. More precisely, it is faith in Jesus Christ as the risen Lord and Saviour. On the other hand, we are saved by God’s grace. This means that we are saved by God and God saves us through his grace. In Ephesians, Paul is talking about salvation. Paul tells us how we’ve been rescued from sin and death. We’ve been rescued by God’s grace through Jesus Christ’s atoning death and resurrection.

It is in the context of that discussion of grace and faith that we come to the last verse: “*For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*” We tend to often individualize this verse, use this verse against the backdrop of missionary work, and individual/specific tasks for each person. Yet set in the context of this whole passage – a passage that speaks about our being made alive in Christ, a passage that speaks about God’s power saving us, God’s power raising us up in Christ, and God’s power seating us with God in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus – the good works to

which Paul refers are the good works of living as the new creation. We Christians are at the centre of God's new creation. We are his workmanship. So our work is a form of glory.

Salvation is far more than forgiveness of sins. From this passage, we see that salvation is deliverance from death and wrath. Salvation is new life in Christ. Salvation is about being made alive, being raised and seated and enthroned. Salvation is glory.