

The Free Gift
Ephesians 2:1-10

1 Corinthians 1:1-17

1 Corinthians 1:18-31

Responsive Psalm 119:1-12

This morning we are going to be starting out in chapter 2, looking at the first 10 verses specifically this morning. This is such a rich section of text, unknown, or misunderstood by a large amount of people who claim Christ. This is the fulfillment of the reality of what we have in Christ. In chapter 1 Paul made the statement that we are predestined us to adoption as God's children, chosen before the foundation of the world, and here in chapter 2 we find the application of that reality. In chapter 1 Paul laid out God's plan, revealing as he says the mystery of God's will which he purposed within himself, and here in chapter 2 Paul shifts to the execution of that plan, Gods interpersonal work within the lives of his predestined children. So let us go ahead and read our passage this morning, verse 1-10 in chapter 2 of Ephesians.

In verse 1, the phrase “He made alive” is in italics because it was not in the original Greek text. This is a phrase that has been added by translators, largely it would seem to give us context into what Paul is saying here. This is not some interpretational leap, inference, or stretch by the translators though, for Paul does make this statement in verse 5, “Even when we were dead in trespasses made us alive together with Christ.” have you ever clicked on an article or a video which had an interesting headline you wanted to know more about, to find out that the information you are looking for is buried deep in the bottom of the article, so, what happens is you end up spending a lot of time getting into the meat of what is being said? Its a term called, burying the lead. It is an intentional process designed to make you spend more time on that site, or page, or video for you to be fed more advertisements and the author to make more money.

Now of course that isn't what Paul is doing here, there is no such motivation in his letter, but the interpreters included this in verse 1 for us to know right from the start where this is going, starting with the reality of the hope we have in Christ, as Paul explains the dire state in which humanity exists. If we were to remove this italicized phrase and read it as written in the original language, it does not change the reality, or the meaning of this text one bit. This was just the interpreters putting the point in the title, unburying the lead, highlighting the reality of God's work in the lives of his children. “And you, who were in trespasses and sins, have been made alive.”

Each and every person born of Adam, that is in this world are born spiritually dead, lost in the sin. This is not a sickness with a cure, the word Paul uses is dead, the implication here is that dead people can not help themselves, dead people have no agency over anything, and though there maybe physical life, we are all born spiritually dead, unable to even see or know God. As Jesus stated in John chapter 3, “Truly, Truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.” There is a work that must be done, and we are all spiritual corpses, so that work must be done by God to make us spiritually alive again, able to see and know God. This spiritual deadness, is the result of the curse which by his rebellion Adam brought upon the entire human race. God told him, you may eat of any tree, except this one and the day that you do you shall surely die.

Adam did not physically die that day that he ate of it, but he spiritually died. There is now a separation between God and his creation that is the result of Adam's sin. With that action there was a curse, and a warning, and by that action sin and corruption entered the world separating us from God. Making all who are born of Adam, which is every living human, spiritually dead, hopeless, and helpless to save themselves from the curse of the fall. And as Paul writes in verse 2, it is "in this 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." In our flesh there is no escaping the realities of sin, our natural inclination as humans is toward rebellion of God. The world has a fundamental belief system, and that system says that You are all the matters, your success, your life, your experiences and don't let anyone or anything get in your way. We in our natural state will never pursue God for his ways are complete opposite of our ways, all of mankind's philosophy looks to self, even other religions goal is to elevate self to the divine through various rituals or sufferings.

Paul says here that this viewpoint of the world, this philosophy, this belief system is of Satan, full of self delusion and self importance, built upon the lie that we are at our core good, therefore we deserve good, and the better we do, the more good we deserve. We see this with the new age ideas of putting out good vibes, good thoughts, in an attempt to put out good in the world to manifest good for ourselves. But God's calling, calls for sacrifice, says there will be suffering, but he also says that the suffering of this world will not compare to the riches of our inheritance. God says, put aside self, consider yourself lower than one another, serve in preference to one another, seeking the others good over your own, this is the exact and total opposite of the worlds view of self in which by nature we are all caught up in, and blinded by so we are unable to see God, to understand him, and to know him because it is so foreign to us, and offensive to our concept of self.

Mankind believes themselves to be divine, the master over their own fate, subjecting all things to their own will, this is reflected in the mantra, my body my choice, a pure act of selfishness without the faintest concept of care for the other, for the helpless life in the womb. A perversion brought about by the elevation of the idea of self, there is nothing that matters other than self, and we are each going to do whatever we feel like. You see how this rebellious mindset is such a part of the human experience? It is inescapable, undeniable, and leaves us lost and hopeless, we are dead in this rebellion unable to see outside of ourselves....unless there is an awakening, a calling which has the power to raise the dead, are we able to see the kingdom of God, because it is so foreign to us, we are blinded by our own sense of worth, and being not seeing ourselves for who we truly are before God, because we can't know God until he reveals to us our brokenness and rebellion.

And such were each and every one of us, as Paul writes in verse 3, "we also once conducted ourselves in the lusts of the flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath." the inescapable truth, mankind is born into an inheritance of disobedience, rebellion, and wrath. Seeking the desires of our flesh, again that is seeking what is best for ourselves, our needs, our comfort, our desire, our pleasure with little to no concern of the other. You can't challenge my viewpoint because you are wrong, because what I think, what I feel, what I know is all that matters. It takes a work of God to break us out of this tomb of self worship, because our hearts and our minds are those of the spiritually dead who are unable to do otherwise.

But look at this, Paul is writing this in the past tense, he says, You who ONCE walked this way. There is hope of escape from the dismal state of mankind, and that hope is in Christ, the one who has raised us from this spiritual death, to a new life in him.

But there is hope outside of this, we do not have to remain dead for God has called out of this mass of dry dead bones, a people whom by his own resurrection power has made alive again. Bringing spiritual life into an otherwise dead wasteland of corpses like the images we get in the book of Ezekiel, when God told him to prophesy over the valley of dead bones, preach the word he has been given, the word of life as God makes the dead to rise to life. Verse 4, “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.).

In Christ we are no longer “children of wrath” for we no longer walk as we once walked according to the flesh, but now, in Christ we are able to walk in the spirit. Simply, and only because of his rich mercy and love toward us. This love of God is unconditional, that is to say he loved us while we were yet lost in our sin and rebellion, he loved us when we were at enmity with him, he loved us though we were incapable of loving him in return. His love for us is not predicated on our ability to love him, because he loved us before we were able, and by his love and mercy, we can see the grace we have been given and now can do nothing else but to love him. God's mercy and love is no extended to us because of our own goodness, but purely in himself. If God's love was contingent on our own goodness there would be none saved, but his mercy and grace goes beyond our sin, penetrates through that darkness, breaths life into our dead heart and mind, so we may see, so we may know him who saved us from the wrath to come, poured out upon the sinful and dying world.

In verse 5 and 6 here, Paul lays out 3 things that God's love and mercy has done for us, first he made us alive together with Christ, he raised us up together, and made us sit together. People who are spiritually dead toward God can not make themselves alive, it takes an act of God, and it took the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross to open the way, and it takes the grace and mercy of God to resurrect us from the spiritual death into life. Being raised up together with Christ is our eternal status before God. God raised us up, together with Christ with the same power he used in raising Jesus. Think on that for a minute, let that sink in...the same power it took to bring Jesus back from the dead, is the power needed to bring your dead soul to life in him. This is why mankind can never save itself, this is why we can never be good enough to please God, because it literally takes God's sovereign power over death to resurrect us into life.

When we come to Christ, we have not merely been given a new life, but our identity is sealed within his own resurrection. It is finished, our salvation has been accomplished by the blood of Jesus. And now Jesus has risen, and sits at the right hand with the father. Likewise scripture tells us that in Christ we are now dead to our sins, we have been raised up, to sit in union with him, in the very presence of God. When God looks upon us, he no longer sees our sin, but he sees the blood of his Son, and we can sit with Christ as the adopted children we are having our sins forgiven and the slate of judgment against us wiped clean. Despite the glories we can see now in this reality, the best is yet to come when we are called to leave this body and be in the very presence of God. As Paul says in verse 7 “ That in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us in Christ.”

On that day it will all be made clear, what we see now darkly, a shrouded blurred image will be made clear and we will one day see God face to face. No longer bound in this flesh, no longer struggling with or old sin nature, but we will be free to glory in the everlasting grace we have been given seeing the full reality as we worship before the throne of the God who loved us.

Without God's grace, without him first loving us, we would still be as Paul said in the beginning of this chapter, dead in our trespasses, walking according to the course of this world. As if he hasn't been clear enough, Paul doubles down in verse 8, he says. "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God." So many take this verse and sort of twist it on its head, we have been saved by faith which is somehow a belief that we were able to conjure up ourselves. We are saved because we have faith...yes, but Paul doesn't say we are saved because we exercise the faith we have.. no we have been given it, and it is a gift of God. Again just how we are unable to raise ourselves from the dead, we are unable to have faith unless it has first been gifted to us by God. It is by God's mercy he grants us faith to believe, it is by God's grace he has given us this gift of faith. Just as faith is a gift given to us so that we may believe, it is also an unmerited gift.

By that I mean, here is nothing in us, there is nothing we have, or can do to earn it, it is a free gift given to undeserving people. This is how God designed it, the fact that it takes a free gift from him to know him, and to believe upon him is intentional so that there is nothing in us that we can boast about or glory in except in Christ in whom we have found forgiveness, and in the father in whom we have been given this gift of faith. Paul lays it out explicitly, in verse 9, our salvation is by grace, and grace alone, not of works lest anyone should boast. If our faith was something we could create, or conjure up enough of ourselves to believe that would give us something to boast about. Years ago I worked with a guy who said to me, "I am so glad that God made me smart enough to believe." Believing that his ability to believe was based upon his own ability to understand, that he was smart enough to understand the bible, that he was smart enough to understand God. This concept is exactly the kind of bragging that Paul is talking about here, the idea that we are capable, without a work of God, to see God, to know God, and the understand him only builds up pride in ourselves and our own capabilities.

It really is a dangerous mindset to understand salvation in this way, for it builds up pride and arrogance when the reality is we have nothing to boast of in and of ourselves, we were lost, children of wrath just as the others and if it wasn't for simply for God's grace toward us, we would still be. No amount of genius, or personal capability can alter the reality of our state before God, in fact it would seem that scripture teaches the opposite. For not many called as we read in 1 Corinthians this morning. God has chosen the foolish things of this world to confound the wise, and the weak things to put to shame the things that are mighty, so that no flesh may glory in his presence. And since this is true, as Paul continues on here in verse 10, "we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them." It is God working in us and through us as we walk through this life, our good works do not bring about merit, or improve our standing before God, but rather it is God working in us to will and to do those things that are pleasing to him.

Every aspect of our salvation and our Christian walk rests upon Christ, the faith that we have been given to believe in his work on the Cross, and the good works that we do in this life as his followers all come from him, and if It wasn't this way, we would have something to boast about, but again this was God's design that we would be brought to nothing, and he would be elevated to above everything. Belief in God truly is understanding your place before him, seeing yourself as the child of wrath you were born to be, mankind is so intrinsically caught up in our own pride and arrogance we can't even see this reality without God's revelation. That is why the predominate view in this world is one of merit, most people believe that they are good enough that in death they will be rewarded heaven.

But God says there is none who are good enough, all have sinned, all have fallen short of his glory, all deserve his wrath for their rebellion and sin...yet he is rich in mercy that he would save those who deserve wrath, that he would rescue those who deserve punishment, that he would send Jesus to take that punishment and wrath for us, so that we may receive the glories of his grace in the gift of faith that is given. So I guess the challenge in today's message, is are you relying upon God, resting in the work of Christ for your faith, or are you trying to work your own way to God? Do you trust in him who has given every spiritual gift in the heavenly places and sealed his people by his own mighty power, or are you trying to find your own way. It is God who works in us to will and to do, it is God who has given us the faith to believe, so it is in God that we should rest, knowing and believing that what he has sent out to accomplish he will indeed accomplish. The call goes out, repent and believe, set aside your pride, your sin, your rebellion and come to him, he who gives the gift of faith, he who blesses his people with every spiritual blessing. Stop trying to be good enough, and rest in he who has accomplished your righteousness already. God economy does not operate upon merit, but simply and only upon grace, and it is his grace which is a free gift given so you can rest in him, a free gift in which you can find peace, and in which you can have hope.