

From Death To Life.

Text: Eph 2:4-10

Suggested Hymns:

520T504, 323, 277, 322, 333

- 1) The Terrible Death In Which We Were Held Captive
- 2) What The Lord Has Done For Us
- 3) We Are Not Worthy Recipients Of God's Grace
- 4) The Evidence Of God's Grace In Our Lives

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Ephesians 2:4-10, *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. (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

We all are interested in “*success stories.*” In our childhood we were delighted to read stories portraying how the hero came up “*from rags to riches.*”

All such stories, however fascinating they may be, do not concern us directly. After all, it means little to me personally that a store clerk finally became one of the richest men in the country. Nor does it effect me personally who wins Masterchef, “Australia’s Got Talent” or any of the many competition based programs on TV.

But there is a success story in our text that is not only remarkable but that intimately concerns you and me. It is your story and my story. It is the story of the greatest change that can come to a man: *From Death to Life by the Grace of God.* May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. The Terrible Death In Which We Were Held Captive

The man relating this story is the Apostle Paul. His audience is the Christian congregation at Ephesus, in Asia Minor. It is composed of Jews and Gentiles, with the Gentile Christians predominating. Paul is telling this congregation what great things God has done for them, that He has raised them from death to life.

He begins by describing the terrible death in which they — and we — were held captive. He says bluntly in our text that *we were dead in trespasses*. That was the natural condition of those Ephesian Christians. That was our natural condition. That is the natural condition of every person. *Dead in trespasses*.

Indeed, if you look at man outwardly, his cheeks may have a healthy, rosy glow, his step may be alert and active, but down deep in his soul there sits death.

That was not man's original condition. God had made man with "a living soul." God had imparted to him His own divine life, and ornamented his soul with the most beautiful attributes — holiness, righteousness, obedience, and fellowship. It was a most blessed condition.

But people are no longer in this blessed condition. Those glorious attributes are gone and in place of life there is death. The nature of this death Paul describes particularly in the three verses that precede our text.

What really is death? Since God is the Source of all life, death is separation from God. In our text the reference is not to mere physical death (the people spoken of were physically quite active) but to spiritual death.

What brought about this death? Paul says, "*we were dead in trespasses*," literally "by sins" or "through our sins." It was sin, transgression of God's Law, that separated us from God.

How did this death manifest itself? Of what did it consist? We may illustrate this by considering the example of a physically dead person.

Firstly, a physical corpse has lost the glow of health and beauty. So man, spiritually dead, has lost the beauty of holiness and righteousness in which he was created.

Secondly, a corpse is unable to move at all. So a spiritually dead man is unable to do anything good or God-pleasing. He has no fear of God, love, trust, love to the neighbour. Consider, for example, Adam and Eve after the Fall.

Thirdly, a corpse is unable to think or understand. So a spiritually dead man is unable to think spiritual thoughts, and understand spiritual truth.¹

Fourthly, a corpse is unable to will. So man, spiritually dead, is unable to will what is good and God-pleasing. He is unable to turn to God or even desire to do so.²

But while a spiritually dead man is utterly inactive so far as thinking, willing, or doing anything good or God-pleasing is concerned, he is very active in opposing God and offending Him. In this regard a spiritually dead person is worse than a physically dead person.

A spiritually dead person follows “*the course of this world.*”³ He follows the ways and practises of the ungodly, apostate world, which is the enemy of God. And the guiding spirit in all this opposition to God is the devil, who holds the ungodly world and the individual sinner in bondage, using them as the willing tools of his wickedness.⁴

And thus people by nature, both Jews and Gentiles, walk according to the lusts of the flesh, in coarse outward sins,⁵ and according to the desires of the mind. Even the powers of their reason and understanding have being darkened and alienated from God, tending only away from God.

Fifthly, a corpse, finally, is abhorrent to a living person. He shudders at the sight of it and shrinks from it. So man, dead in sins, is abhorrent to the holy, righteous, and living God. God cannot have communion with sinful man.⁶ God’s wrath is aroused against him, “*children of wrath by nature,*” and finally God will have to separate the sinner from Himself forever in hell (which is eternal death). That is the condition Paul refers to in our text when he says, *we were dead in trespasses.*

But notice that Paul says “*were.*” Is there perhaps any one here who must confess: That is still my condition; I do not love God; I love sin, walking according to the course of the world, etc? If so, then make haste and save your soul! Hear what the Lord has done for you.

2. What The Lord Has Done For Us

What has happened? When we were in this deplorable condition, God took pity on us. He looked on us in “*mercy.*” God’s mercy really means His

“kindness or good will towards the miserable and afflicted, joined with a desire to relieve them.”

And this mercy of God is not a hesitant mercy but a mercy that is **“rich,”** and exhaustless. It is the mercy of which we sing, *He saw my lost and wretched state And planned my soul’s salvation.*⁷ And the motive that prompts this mercy is God’s **“love,”** His **“great”** love. By reason of, on account of that love, God has revealed to us what He has done for us in the Holy Scriptures.

What did God’s love prompt Him to do for us? Paul says, He has ***made us alive together with Christ ...,*** ⁶ ***and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.*** In a word, He led us into fellowship with Christ. He brought us to faith in Christ.

How this great change was brought about in us, Paul explained in Ephesians 1:13, ¹³ ***In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation.*** While we were walking in our own ways, alienated from God, at enmity with God, the Gospel of the salvation which Christ gained for us was brought to us. This Gospel melted our stony hearts, and enlightened our sin-darkened minds. We recognised Jesus as our Saviour and Redeemer.

We received ***“the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”***⁸ In Christ we recognised God as our dear heavenly Father, and His wonderful love towards us.⁹ This love won our heart, and moved us to say, ***“We love Him because He first loved us.”*** It completely transformed our will; filled us with hatred against sin, which had brought us into death, which also caused the death of our dear Saviour. It filled us with the desire to consecrate our life with all its affections and powers to the service of Jesus Christ who loved us and gave Himself for us.

Thus we became alive, alive unto God, united with Him by faith in His Son.¹⁰ We fear, love, and trust in Him and serve Him in good works. In a word, we were converted, turned from sin and Satan to God. We were regenerated, born again, born into a new, spiritual life.

However, the apostle does not merely say that we have been ***made alive,*** but has ***made us alive together with Christ.*** After Christ had died for our sins, God made Him alive again on the third day. However, Christ did not thereby return

to His former earthly life, but entered into an entirely new and different mode of life.

Whereas His former life was lived in relation to sin, to its atonement and blotting out, His life now is lived only in relation to God, directed by God, and lived entirely to His glory. Into this new life of Christ we, too, entered at our conversion,¹¹ of course, not yet according to the flesh, but according to the spirit. When the Lord raised us from spiritual death and implanted His own spiritual life in us, our soul was directed to God. The new man in us is turned to God, loves Him, rejoices in Him and desires to do His will. It is a life lived wholly for God and in communion with Him.¹²

The apostle states this fact even more emphatically by adding, *and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus*. God not only made Christ alive in the grave but also raised Him up out of the grave and received Him into heaven. Christ has now entered into a super-earthly, heavenly existence, even according to His human nature, even as man. He is now a “heavenly” man.¹³

Now, when we were converted, we entered into this same heavenly existence with Christ according to the spirit. The new life created in us is not of the earth, earthy, but heavenly.

As Christians our thoughts are now directed altogether heavenward, are with Christ in heaven. We can truthfully sing, *“I’m but a stranger here, Heaven is my home.”* We are like a loving child, temporarily separated from home, yet in spirit always sharing the life at home. We know that we are God’s children, now already, and that Christ is our Brother. What an honour! What blessedness!¹⁴

And the final purpose of all that the gracious God has done for us so far is *that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus*.

As the satisfaction of His love was God’s motive in making us alive and raising us, so the manifestation of His glory in its surpassing wealth is His final purpose in making us alive. The new life which we received at our regeneration is to pass over into eternal life.

By the expression “*the ages to come*” the apostle means the endless ages that make up eternity. As the Jews distinguished the time before the Messiah and the time after the advent of the Messiah, so the New Testament writers distinguish this age, before the return of Christ, a period of instability, weakness, impiety, wickedness, calamity, misery, and the future age, the age after the return of Christ.

God’s purpose therefore is that in the eternal future, the future which opens with Christ’s return, and in all the continuing length of that future, the grace of His ways with those once dead in sins should be declared and understood in all the grandeur of its exceeding riches.

At Christ’s return, when this ungodly world will fall under the eternal wrath of God, we who also by nature were the children of wrath but have received grace in Christ and were implanted in His life shall experience the exceeding riches of God’s grace.

He will receive us, body and soul, into His heavenly kingdom and shower upon us forever the manifestations of His divine kindness and goodness. And all this “*through Christ Jesus,*” our Saviour, whom we shall then see face to face and whose saving grace we shall praise forevermore. Indeed, from death to life by the grace of God!

3. We Are Not Worthy Recipients Of God’s Grace

However, we shall not fully appreciate what God has done for us until we realise that we were in no way worthy of what God has done for us and in no way contributed to His saving efforts in our behalf.

This the apostle now proceeds to show. He says 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.*

Firstly, the apostle emphasises that we owe this salvation which we have received to the “grace” of God. This grace of God in Christ has three sides to it.

It is first of all an act of spontaneous favour on God’s part, of favour wherein no mention can be made of obligation. God did not owe us what He did for us. Furthermore, this grace was free. It was not nullified by our sin nor conditioned by our works. Our good or evil works did not come into consideration at all.

Finally, this grace bestowed upon us a positive gift, Christ's righteousness, leading on to eternal life.

Secondly, Paul says that this salvation which we have received at our conversion we have received "*through faith.*" When God converted us, He kindled faith in our hearts. This faith conferred on us the righteousness of Christ and at the same time directed our heart heavenward, so that we now rightly know God as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, as our dear Father, and sincerely fear and love Him and trust in Him.

Thirdly, the apostle adds, *and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 'not of works, lest anyone should boast.* That we have been converted and saved we cannot ascribe in the least to anything that we have done or merited, to our own will or decision, to "lesser guilt," "right attitude," etc. It is altogether God's gift, 100 per cent. And nothing that we did, or merited, before our conversion moved Him to give it to us. All boasting or drawing of favourable comparisons with others is excluded.

Fourthly, the apostle emphasises, *For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus.* The Christian says, *All that I am as a Christian I owe to God, He made me what I am today.* He created me anew in Christ Jesus, brought me to faith in Christ, and thereby made me a new creature.¹⁵

Let us realise ever more vividly what God has done for us and think of it daily. The result will soon become evident in our personal life and in that of the congregation, as Paul shows in conclusion.

4. The Evidence Of God's Grace In Our Lives

A fine building is a perpetual monument to its architect. A beautiful painting publishes the praise of the artist that produced it. And so, says Paul *For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works.*

The purpose for which God converted us, regenerated us, made us new creatures, is that we should now walk in newness of life, perform the good works of which we have become capable now that we have been raised from spiritual death to spiritual life.

We notice that whenever God speaks of this matter, of what He has done for us, He always stresses that the fruit will be a new life, a life lived to the glory of God.¹⁶

While people are still dead in sins, which is the case with all unbelievers, they are unable to do any good works. The so-called good works of the unbelievers are simply “glistening sins.” But now that we are spiritually alive, it is only natural that we will show forth that life in spiritual activity, in doing the things to which God’s Holy Spirit dwelling in us prompts us.

Concerning the good works which the Christians are now to perform the apostle says *which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them*. The Christian, accordingly, does not first have to invent good works for himself (such as monasticism, fasting, and the self-elected “holiness” of the sects) but God has already prepared them for him. The Christian needs only to walk in them.

And where has God prepared them? *“In Christ Jesus,”* in whom we have been created. Living in Christ implies living in good works, living as Christ lived. Since the Christian lives in communion with Christ, and daily draws strength from Him,¹⁷ he will manifest Christ’s nature in his daily life. He will show forth a Christ-like holiness, purity, humility, kindness, gentleness, etc.¹⁸

Examine yourself accordingly: Are you alive, or are you still spiritually dead? Do you love to commune with God in prayer as Christ did? To be about your Father’s business? Is this your purpose, to do the will of Him that sent you and to finish His work, etc.?

If not, then you are dead. You are of the world, you will perish with the world and your condition is deplorable. If so, then read Ephesians 5:14, *“Awake, you who sleep, Arise from the dead, And Christ will give you light.”* Study the Word, hear the Gospel, that the Saviour’s love may melt your stony heart.

If, however, you discern such life in you, but must deplore its feebleness, give Christ more room in your heart and life. Regular church attendance, daily Bible-reading, and prayer. Crucify your Old Adam and take an active part in church-life. Thus your cold heart and members will become warm, more vigorous, and alive.

May God, grant us a more honest realisation of what we were by nature, a deeper appreciation of His mercy shown to us in Christ Jesus, a more fervent consciousness of the fact that we are not worthy of the least of all these mercies.

May we have a correspondingly greater zeal in walking in the good works which God has prepared for us in Christ, so that in the ages to come we may praise forever the exceeding riches of God's grace and kindness toward us.

Now you know the greatest success story ever told. Your story and my story. From death to life by the grace of God. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ 1 Cor. 2:14; John 1:5

² Gen. 6:5, Rom. 8:7

³ Ephesians 2:2

⁴ 1 John 5:19

⁵ Gal 5:19-21

⁶ Psa. 5:4, 5

⁷ Hymn 322 v3

⁸ 2 Cor. 4:6

⁹ Rom 5:6-8; 2 Cor. 5:19,21

¹⁰ Gal. 3:26

¹¹ Colossians 2:13

¹² Col. 3:3; Gal. 2:20

¹³ 1 Cor. 15:48

¹⁴ 1 John 3:1,2

¹⁵ 2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15

¹⁶ e.g., Titus 2:11-14; 1 John 3:3; John 15:8; 1 Pet. 2:9; Luke 1:74, 75.

¹⁷ John 15:5

¹⁸ Cf. Gal. 5:22, 23; Eph. 5:8, 9