

Alive With Christ.

Text: Eph 2:4-10

Suggested Hymns:

387, 189, 334, 329

1) By the work of God's Grace

2) To the glory of God's Grace

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,

The message of Easter may be summed up in one word: **LIFE**. The source of our life is God, and the goal of our life is God. We read in Acts 17:28 that *in Him we live and move and have our being*. He creates and sustains our life and gives us the assurance of eternal life — not because we deserve this, but simply because He loves us. This unmerited love of God is what we call His grace.

Grace is the central doctrine of Christianity. It is this factor that distinguishes Christianity from all other religions. Every man-made religion teaches salvation by works — by human co-operation, human achievement, or human self-improvement. Christianity alone teaches salvation by grace. This fact alone stamps the Christian religion as divine. Man could never have devised such a unique plan of redemption.

The saving grace of God is the theme of the great passage that forms our text today — one of the classic passages in the pattern of Christian doctrine. In this text St. Paul extols the grace of God and the blessings that it brings. This grace was manifest on Easter. This grace is manifest in every Christian life.

Let us give thanks to God for His grace. Our theme for today is *Alive with Christ*. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. We Are Alive By The Work Of God's Grace

St. Paul begins his presentation of divine grace by citing our lost condition. By nature "*we were dead in trespasses.*" We were dead in sins. Death, of course, is the opposite of life. A dead man can do nothing. There is no feeling, and no activity in death. We speak of "*dead weight*" or a "*dead ball*" to illustrate this absence of life.

What is more, there are no stages between death and life. There is actually no such thing as being "*half dead.*" There is no question, therefore, about our spiritual condition by nature. We were capable of not the slightest movement in God's direction.

Not the feeblest spark of life was there to be fanned into a spiritual flame. It was out of this state of utter spiritual death, therefore, that God called us and *made us alive* as the apostle puts it. We not only could not help in this process of becoming alive; we did not deserve to be made alive, for we were dead in sins. Our life, therefore, is totally the gift of God's grace.

Why He should want us to live, we shall never know — except that love is His very nature. He is that kind of God. St. Paul describes Him in this way, *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. And we are made alive, "together with Christ."* Because He lives, we live.

But there is more. He *raised us up together* with Christ. Because He rose, we shall rise. Indeed, we rise daily unto "*newness of life*" as we learn in Romans 6:4. And we shall rise at last, in the resurrection on the Last Day. His resurrection is the pledge of our own.

And as we are made alive and raised up together with Christ, so we also *sit together in the heavenly places* with Him. We belong to His fellowship. We are

joined to the circle of His redeemed. He has received us into His holy body, the church.

The church is not something that we “*belong to.*” The church is something that we are. Christ is the Head; we are the members. We live by the power that He communicates to us. We share that vitality with those who, together with us, are members of His body.

Thus, if one member suffers, all suffer. If one rejoices, all rejoice. If one is injured, the pain is shared by all. And if one is cut off, the loss is felt by all.

Our fellowship with Christ in the church is what St. Paul describes as “*sitting in heavenly places.*” The blest communion with our Lord is not simply a future expectation; it is a present reality. That sacred fellowship becomes real for us in the church. And that church is not merely a building, or an outward organisation, but the “communion of saints,” who belong to their Lord and one another.

The bond of this fellowship is faith — faith in the atoning merits of Jesus Christ who is the church’s Head. The source of this fellowship is grace — the divine love that from eternity willed our salvation and called us from death in sin to life in Christ. And the goal of this fellowship is glory — glory that shall be ours as we join to sing God’s praise around His throne.

It is this blessed condition of the children of God that the apostle presents when he goes on to say in our text, ⁷ *that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.*

It is this picture of the rich and overflowing grace of God, that moved the hymnist to write:¹

Through every period of my life
Thy goodness I’ll pursue;
And after death, in distant worlds.
The glorious theme renew.

That is why the apostle continues to emphasise, in our text, that we are alive to the glory of God’s grace.

2. We Are Alive To The Glory Of God’s Grace

⁸ *For by grace you have been saved through faith* the apostle insists, *and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God.* It may seem at first thought as though St. Paul is repeating himself, that he is saying the same thing over and over again. The very repetition of the theme, however, shows its importance. St. Paul wants to make sure that his meaning is perfectly clear and that we will have no excuse for misunderstanding it.

Grace is the source of our salvation. And faith is the hand that receives the offered gift. Grace and faith are really two sides of the same coin — the coin of eternal salvation. His grace would not avail for us unless we believe His promise. And we cannot believe His promise without His grace.

St. Paul drives that point home by emphasising, *and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not of works, lest anyone should boast.* Salvation is not of ourselves — that must be made crystal clear. Even the capacity to believe does not reside within us — it is imparted to us by God’s Holy Spirit. Nor are we saved in view of our faith. It is wholly the gift of God.

If it were otherwise, we could claim some of the credit. But any such idea is excluded. *“Not of works,”* the apostle declares, *lest anyone should boast.* It would be impossible to find a more sweeping denial of human merit, a more complete rejection of the universal doctrine of work-righteousness.

This statement of the Apostle Paul is really a natural consequence of the First Commandment, *“Thou shalt have no other gods before Me.”* It leaves no room for any other doctrine of salvation than *“by grace alone.”*

Man in his natural pride seeks to account for, or at least assist in, his own salvation. But by that very effort he is guilty of what St. Paul calls *“boasting,”* and by his vain ambition he displaces the true God with another — a god made in the image of man himself.

This is the great idolatry. And so we must summon the doctrine of work-righteousness before the bar of God’s justice and call it by its rightful name: idolatry.

In shining contrast, however, we attribute our salvation completely to the gift of God. And God has a special object in view in decreeing our salvation, as the apostle makes clear in the final verse of our text: ¹⁰ *For we are His*

workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

A skilled workman takes pride in his craftsmanship. He labours long and lovingly over the object of his skill, whether it be a wood carving, or a piece of pottery, or an oil painting.

God is the divine Workman who has shaped us as the particular objects of His love and care. He has, indeed, poured us into a special mould, that we might be shaped in the image of His Son.

But He has fashioned us not simply to be objects of art, ornaments that serve no useful purpose. He has rather made us for a special reason; for, as the text declares, we are created “*for good works.*”

It is important that we understand this matter of “*good works*” correctly. The Christian life does not consist in the mere routine performance of a series of ethically correct actions, or in the mere display of outward piety, or in assuming the garb of social respectability, or in echoing the accepted doctrinal formulas, or in observing the Golden Rule.

Christians are not merely to be “*nice people.*” Christians are to be new people. The difference lies in the motivation. It is quite possible to be moral and respectable from totally wrong motives — human pride, or the fear of social disapproval, or the coercion of the Law.

The only motivation that produces the kind of “*good works*” that are acceptable to God, and that are the hallmark of the sanctified life, is the motivation of Christ’s constraining love and the blessed impulse of His Holy Spirit.

To be a Christian does not mean only that we must improve our way of life. It means that we must change our way of life. But such a change does not lie within our own power. It depends upon the operation of God’s Holy Spirit, who alone can make us new creatures.

For we, after all, are “*His workmanship.*” And, fashioned anew by His grace, we are prompted to do those things that are pleasing to Him and in harmony with His will — just because we belong to Him.

And concerning such “*good works*,” our text concludes that *God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.*

Over the entrance to the chapel of Stanford University there is a beautiful mosaic, depicting Christ’s Sermon on the Mount. This mosaic is composed of thousands of tiny stones of various sizes, shapes, and colours. However, the artist had the finished design in mind before he began his work; and when he put all these various stones together in their proper places, they combined to form one complete and beautiful picture.

God from eternity has designed the pattern of our lives. Every good deed, every noble impulse, every pious thought comes from Him. He puts them all together, piece by piece, to complete the picture of our life. And when the pieces are all put together, they will reveal the image of His Son.

So to conclude, we are alive with Christ by the work of God’s Grace, and we are alive with Christ to the glory of God’s Grace. Amen.

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

¹ Hymn 451