

9 MAY 2021 – 9AM

RESTORED [EPHESIANS 2:1-10]

Introduction – Be Expectant

Before we get into the passage proper this morning, I want to re-read to you the prayer that came at the end of last week's passage. This is Ephesians 1:17-19 - **I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better.** ¹⁸ **I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people,** ¹⁹ **and his incomparably great power for us who believe.**

Well in Ephesians 2, Paul lays a platform for this prayer to be answered. God's desire is that by the power of the Holy Spirit we might see just how glorious our hope in Christ is, just how rich his love and how explosive his power is. Don't let the same old preacher, the same old building, or even a familiar passage cause complacency. Know that God is here and is ready to be at work in your heart so that you might know his glories in anew this morning. Let's pray that God would do just that.

1. Dead in Transgressions and Sins (2:1-3)

Having been away for some time on long service leave, naturally there was some cleaning for us to do when we returned home. On one particular occasion we were cleaning out our storage room when Steph (with impressive calmness!) called my attention to a stack of pots. Lifting up some of the smaller pots at the top of the stack, my eyes fell upon an unpleasant sight – a pot full of dead lizards all huddled up and decomposing.

Why all the lizards chose to go to the grave in such a fashion I am unsure, but what I can tell you is that the sight was grotesque. To make matters more unsettling, when I moved the pot, a limb or a tail would flop about, giving the impression that they were still alive somehow. But a glance back at their decomposed eyes, or the white mould covering their rotting corpses made it clear that these lizards were well and truly dead. There was nothing pleasant about the scene. It was grisly. So gross that I couldn't even bear to keep the pot, it went in the bin as well.

Happy Mother's Day! I apologise for that macabre and squeamish beginning, but I mention it because I don't want our familiarity with Ephesians 2 to cause us to miss the force what we hear in Ephesians 2:1, **As for you, you were *dead* in your transgressions and sins.**

Think of that grotesque pot of rotting lizards. That is who we were. That is humanity in sin – dead and decaying. Dead to the life of God and grotesque in his sight. Now to a room full of living people in a world that feels very much alive, what is Paul talking about? How on earth could this be the case? We get three reasons in the following verses.

1.1 *Dead under the Tyranny of Satan*

Let's read again from verse 1, **As for you, you were *dead* in your transgressions and sins,** ² **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.**

We don't have time now to unpack the significance of the title, but the ruler of the Kingdom of the air is none other than Satan, whom elsewhere Jesus labels as the father of lies and a murderer since the beginning (John 8:44). Satan is the wellspring of evil in the world and these verses affirm that this evil is spiritual, pervasive and indeed present in this world.

This reality was driven home to me recently when listening to a former US Navy SEAL describe his experiences in Iraq. Though not a believer, seeing the torture chambers of Saddam's former regime, witnessing suicide bombers use women and children as human shields, he confessed that all he witnessed was so non-human that it could only be explained by a real presence of evil in the world.

Ephesians 2 and the rest of scripture affirms this. Evil is pervasive. We see it in the ISIS beheadings. We see it in the sex traffickers in Eastern Europe who stuff shipping containers with abducted women. We see it in South East Asia through the children forced in child pornography. We see it in Sydney with adults paying for such pornographic images. We see it in Africa when children starve of malnutrition whilst we in Australia battle obesity and food wastage. We experience it when a family is torn apart by the lusts and cravings of sexual infidelity. We manifest it in our own outbursts of rage and bitter resentments.

Evil is pervasive in our world and holds sway over and in our lives. We are dead in sin and separated from the life of God because of Satan's tyranny.

1.2 Dead under the Bondage of Sin

Yet lest we think we are hapless victims of Satan, Eph 2:3 goes onto say, **All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts.**

Many I'm sure are familiar with the term 'golden handcuffs.' Think of the successful businessperson on a six-figure salary working for that multinational company, yet chained to the desk with excessive work demands. They are in bondage, yet in handcuffs of their own choosing.

So it is with our sin. We are in bondage to it, but this owing to our own sinful desires. We may well be subject to the tyranny of evil in this world, but we ourselves are complicit. Our human nature has been corrupted by sin such that no physical yearning of the flesh or thought of the mind is free from its stain. From birth, our impulse is to assert our independence from God and exalt ourselves over others. We are culpable.

1.3 Dead under God's Wrath

Dead under the tyranny of Satan, dead due to our bondage to sin, yet thirdly in verse 3, dead under God's wrath, **Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.**

Like those rotting lizards, in sin we are a stench to God and destined for destruction under this wrath. Our God is consistently and comprehensively just. Listen to Psalm 5:4-6, **For you are not a God who is pleased with wickedness; with you, evil people are not welcome.** ⁵ **The arrogant cannot stand in your presence. You hate all who do wrong;** ⁶ **you destroy those who tell lies. The bloodthirsty and deceitful you, Lord, detest.**

He will not look upon evil and he will not abide with it. As those under God's wrath we were dead-men and women walking, dead in our sins and transgressions, cut off from God and awaiting this horrible fate to be sealed eternally.

This is true of all humanity. God meets all sin, all injustice with his wrath. No one escapes this. The powerful head of state – dead. The acclaimed billionaire – dead. The bold and the beautiful – dead. Sure, some might look better than others for a time, but good looks are nothing but makeup on a corpse. Some may be wealthy, but they are but trinkets buried with the horse.

This is what we were. If we are to understand how glorious our hope is, how great God's love and how explosive God's power in Christ, then we must first come to grips with this troubling reality.

2. Alive in Christ (2:4-10)

But into this hopeless situation comes the intervention of God. Look at 2:4-5, **But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy,⁵ made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.**

As lifeless corpses, we could not reach out to God, *he* reached out to us in Christ and made us alive. But why did he intervene? Firstly because we were helpless, there was nothing we could do for ourselves, we were as unresponsive as a corpse and utterly hopeless. Yet *why* did he help us guilty, wretched, helpless sinners? Was it because there was any life in us worthy of his love? Was it because there was any faith or good intentions in us that merited his rescue? Was Jesus' rescue of us in any way a function of ourselves? No. We were dead, unable and incapable.

The grounds for our salvation were simply God's great love and rich mercy. Chapter 1 has already spoken repeatedly of the riches of God's grace given to us in Christ. In Ephesians 2, God wants us to know the wealth of love that has been lavished upon us in Christ. The grounds of your salvation, the basis for your confidence is entirely outside of yourself and completely in the loving character of God whose love is great and mercy is rich. He saw you, he loved you, he chose you, he rescued you.

Yet some might ask, 'was it really not anything to do with me? What about my response of faith?' That is a great question, are we saved by grace or by faith? Is faith a work that we can boast in? We might not have been able to bring much to the table, but perhaps what sets us apart from the person next to us is a propensity to faithfulness? What is the relationship between faith and grace? Verse 8 sums it up beautifully, **For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.**

Even our faith itself is a gift of God, part of his grace toward spiritually dead and unresponsive sinners. We are saved *by grace through* faith. To use theological speak, faith is the instrumental cause of our salvation and grace is the ultimate cause. To illustrate the point, I'll steal some material from my doctrine lecturer. If I were playing cricket against Graham Hanlon and he hit me over the fence for six, would you say it was his cricket bat which accomplished the six or Graham? Well in a sense you could say both – the bat was the instrument Graham used for the task, it was the instrumental cause of the six, but really the ultimate cause was the one wielding the bat, Graham. In the same way, faith is the instrumental cause of our salvation, but God's grace is the ultimate cause. He gifts us our faith and wields it for our salvation. Why are you alive in Christ today? Solely because God loves you. His love for you is great and his mercy toward you is rich.

But don't miss that faith in Christ is the necessary instrument for our salvation. There is no six without a cricket bat and there is no eternal life apart from faith Christ. Jesus is the only one powerful enough to blaze a trail from death to life, and to move from death to life we need to be in him or with him. How does this happen? Ephesians 1:13 says, **And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit,¹⁴ who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory.**

By faith in Jesus the Holy Spirit joins us to Christ such that his death on the cross becomes our death for sin, the death that we deserved, and his resurrection life becomes our resurrection life. By faith, through the Holy Spirit we are joined to Jesus such that where he goes, we go. And because he rose to his heavenly throne so do we (v 6-7). In fact, Ephesians 1:20-21 says about his ascension that He is seated at God's **right hand in the heavenly realms,²¹ far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.**

That is where Christ is now, and because we are joined to him by faith, though this is not our current experience, it is our present possession. We are seated with Christ. We are no longer dead and decaying, but we are alive and reigning with Christ.

Just think on that for a second. You are no longer a stench in God's nostrils, but his prized child. You are no longer destined for hell, but are seated in heaven with Christ. You are no longer dead and cut off from the life of God, but he has come to reside in you by His Holy Spirit. Furthermore through the Holy Spirit you can begin to say no, and to resist and reject the tyranny of Satan and our bondage to the sinful nature. No longer do you live ignorant of the realities of God and his world, but your eyes have been opened to his holiness, love and ways.

Application – Be Children

So this mother's day, let me encourage you to breathe easy and know that God's love for you is great and his mercy is rich. You are alive in Christ and will be so forever. Let go of your striving, turn away from the worldly impulse to try and make yourself right with God and embrace God's grace in Christ. In fact, by way of application this morning, let me exhort you this Mother's Day to be like little children before God. I know I'm branching out from Ephesians 2 here, but listen to Matthew 18:1-5, **At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who, then, is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"** ² **He called a little child to him, and placed the child among them.** ³ **And he said: "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.** ⁴ **Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.** ⁵ **And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.**

According to Jesus, who are the greatest in the Kingdom? He doesn't here talk about serving or doing. Here in Matthew 18 he talks about being. The greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven are those who are like little children. Little children don't pay their way in a household nor do they earn their parents love, they simply hold out their hands to receive help and love. The greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven are those who truly realise how lowly they are before God, yet how loved they are in Christ. They realise that they bring nothing to the table but only their sin, helplessness and dependence. They hold out their arms like a little child in a high chair looking to be embraced by their Heavenly Father.

Mothers, I trust you understand this. Though you may be pleased or displeased with your children from time to time, your love for them is unconditional because they are your children. How tragic and misplaced would it be for our kids to feel like they needed to earn or purchase our love for them. So it is with God. How tragic it is when we spend our lives trying to earn God's love through good works. Not only does that disastrously overestimate our capacity for righteousness but it tragically underestimates the love of God for us.

Be like a little child this Mother's Day by confessing rather than boasting. Be like a little child this by thanking God for forgiving you and loving you. Be like a little child enjoying your Heavenly Father, speaking with Him and leaning in to listen to what he says. Be like a little child by welcoming all who bear the name of Christ, even those unable to repay you, for so has God loved you in Christ. Rest in the riches of God's great love for you in Christ, you are alive!

And for those who want to find that life and love today for the first time, Jesus invites you to trust in Him, to find forgiveness for your sins and new life now and forevermore. And because it's God who gives the gift of faith, you can know that if even now your heart is stirring with a desire to respond and trust in Jesus, a desire to receive this love, that is the work of God the Holy Spirit in your heart bringing you to new life – praise God!