

St Paul's Church Feilding Sermon for 17 July 2022 by Bobby Kusilifu

Without Christ, we were dead! Ephesians 2:1 - 10

Paul begins chapter 2 by stating the reason why God had to bless us with all the spiritual blessings that we have in Christ, as we saw in chapter 1. The reason is that, without Christ, we were dead, because we were guilty, we were enslaved and we were condemned. This is a very stark and confronting truth! Paul is saying that, without Christ, God's judgment was against us for rejecting him. We were in a state of powerlessness that comes when we don't have a true relationship with our creator. In the end, it leads to everlasting judgment and separation from him. Paul says, we were dead because of our trespasses and sins, in which we once walked. The word "trespasses" means doing the wrong thing, violating the good and right laws that God the creator has set up in the world. It put us out of relationship with him, we were facing his "wrath" and that means that we cannot save ourselves.

But it gets worse. Paul goes on to give us another perspective on our state before God, we were enslaved. We haven't just walked along a path we laid out for ourselves. When we've done wrong, we've actually been walking along a path laid out by others, "following the course of this world, following the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient". The course of this world, is the world we live in. The world around us affects us. We were born into it, and so we're part of it. And because we're part of it, we're living in a world under death and condemnation. We cannot save ourselves. Paul goes even further. He talks about a spiritual power at work in all of this, Satan or the devil. But Satan's power isn't an absolute or ultimate power. His main power is in lies and temptation. Yet lies and temptation can be incredibly powerful. Without Christ, we will believe the lies and give in to temptation. We cannot save ourselves.

For Believers, this state of death and guilt and slavery is, in an important sense, something in the past. We "once" walked this way. The word "once" points forward to a solution. This solution is something only God can give. That's why it's called God's grace, his gift to us. That grace comes from being "in Christ". It involves forgiveness, and resurrection and new creation. God forgives us because Jesus died in our place on the cross. As Paul goes on, he talks about how we've been "raised with Christ" — raised from our dead state — and "seated with Christ" — above the things that otherwise would exercise power over us. So, our job is not to work our way out of it, but to trust him and live the new life he's given us. We need to remember to keep praising and thanking God for the solution. We must not be naïve about ourselves. Until Jesus returns, these things still affect us. We still live in this world. And so, we need to be on guard, take sin seriously, stand firm and constantly look to Christ, not ourselves. We are in a world in which people are dead, guilty, and enslaved when it comes to God. We need the gospel of God's grace in Christ. And as we see in these verses, this is exactly what he has given us.

The next thing we see is God's love. God's love is rich in mercy. Mercy is about

showing undeserved kindness. Mercy is when somebody in a position of power decides not to give us what we deserve. What do we deserve? We deserve God's wrath, because we have offended against him. Left to ourselves, we're in a desperate and hopeless situation before God. But instead of showing that wrath to us, God shows mercy, compassion and pity to us. So, fundamental to God's love, is his mercy. Paul describes God's love as "his great love with which he loved us". God's love is shown in action. He actually loved us by doing something for us. So, love isn't just a desire or attitude. God's love is something that God does. And God didn't love us because we were particularly lovely. In fact, we were "dead because of our trespasses". When we realise that we were dead because of our trespasses, we can see something strange but incredible about God's love.

God clearly didn't approve of who we were or what we did. We'd done the wrong thing, rejected him, ignored him, and rebelled against him. God doesn't approve of any of these things. He didn't actively affirm us in our dead state or support us in our offenses. And yet — he loved us. Deeply and profoundly. How? God showed his love in this way: he "made us alive". This means he changed us for the better, at the core of our being. He changed our status, he gave us a new identity, he brought us into a new reality. He didn't just feel for us, he didn't just affirm us, he loved us. He made us alive. He made us alive in Christ. It's not only that God has brought us from death to life. God has also raised us together with Christ and seated us together with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.

This is a description of victory, power and security. Paul had used these words to talk about Christ himself. God raised Christ from the dead, and exalted him to heaven. Christ is seated in the heavenly places, sharing the throne of his Father in heaven. That means Christ is greater than everyone and everything in this universe — greater than the spiritual powers, and greater than anything that could ever threaten us. Now, Paul says that those who believe in Christ share that place with him. If we have staked our lives on Christ, then what God has already done for Christ is as good as done for us. Paul then goes even further to say that God has now raised and seated us with Christ, "so that in the coming ages he could show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus." This is a glimpse of what eternal life will look like for those who believe in Christ. It tells us what we have to look forward to when our bodies are raised in that new creation. Our future involves incredible blessings from God, being showered on us, to his glory. This is something to lift our eyes to, and remember. It means that our future is secure in Christ Jesus.

Next, Paul reminds us again, that this is not from ourselves, it is the gift of God. Then Paul says even more clearly, "it is not the result of works, so that no one may boast". The basis of our salvation, has nothing to do with our own actions. Faith doesn't come from works, and so salvation doesn't come from works. By saving us in this way, by faith, God has ruled out the possibility that we could boast. That is, there is no way we can take pride in any achievement when it comes to our salvation. We haven't contributed to it, so we don't have any grounds for boasting.

Then finally in verse 10, Paul says that we are created in Christ Jesus for good works. In other words, God hasn't just saved us so we can run around and do our own thing. He has saved us for his own purposes. What has God made us for? We were rescued from God's judgment so that we can live as God's new creation, doing good works for God's purposes. And this is not even something we can boast in. These good works are something that God prepared beforehand for us to walk in. Instead of walking along the path of trespasses and sins and so being ruled by Satan. God has made us walk along a new path, marked out by him. This is the path that God has made us for, and our job, as his new creation, is to walk in it. Remember, our salvation doesn't come from works. But we are saved for works. This is fundamental to our Christian lives. Here we see why God has to do all these for us, because we cannot save ourselves and that God loves us so much.

For reflection:

How do these verses help you to appreciate even more what God has done for you in Christ?

God's grace and peace be with you all,

Bobby Kusilifu