



A KINGDOM OF GRACE

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13 February 2022

Ephesians 2:1–10 (ESV): *And you were dead in the trespasses and sins² in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—³ among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.⁴ But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us,⁵ even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—⁶ and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,⁷ so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast.¹⁰ For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.*

- **The latter half of Paul's prayer in chapter one leaves us with the graphic image of God's power at work in the resurrection of Jesus:**
Ephesians 1:15-23

The most detailed description of the crucifixion can be found in Isaiah 53. It was horrific and brutal. Jesus died quickly, in a matter of hours. Isaiah tells us why – it was not just the brutality of the Romans that put Jesus to death, but the Father had laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

He had been brutally beaten, had lost control of bladder and bowel, his pain-wracked body subject to raging fever. He was marred beyond human likeness. He descended to the lowest, became the worst. Imagine the stench and horror of that tomb in which he had been laid, dank and dark, reeking of the decaying corpse of the crucified.

Until ... Holy Spirit blew into that tomb, gave life to that corpse, raised Him and took Him from dead in the tomb and seated Him with God in heavenly places, far above every principality and power and ruler and dominion for all eternity. He placed Him in unimaginable glory.

From the lowest place to the highest place. To the place of unimaginable glory, at the right hand of the Father, far above all else, and forever so. To the highest place, glorified beyond our comprehension, although the Scriptures repeatedly grant us glimpses.

Paul wants that picture in our minds - the tomb and all of its revulsion and the exalted ascended seated Christ in all of His beauty – as we slip into chapter 2.

- If spiritual death were visible in the natural, it would look like Jesus did when He was entombed. It was us He became, and our death He died:
Ephesians 2:1-3

And you... humanity corporately... were dead in our trespasses and sins. Before coming to faith in Christ, we were as dead as what Jesus was. As entombed. As disfigured. As repulsive. Our death was not through crucifixion, but through trespasses and sins. We were dead and entombed in the fallen ecosystem of our own waywardness, the world in its fallenness, the devil in his rebellion, and humanity in its disobedience. We were utterly carnal, fleshly, both

inside and out. Corrupted in every way. We would look like Jesus in the tomb. That's what sin looks like.

There are those who live in mansions in the natural, but who are dead and entombed in the eternal, spiritual realm. They are dead already, although that might well only be made manifest as they pass into a lost eternity. On the other hand, there are many others who live in desperate squalor circumstantially, but who are in Christ, alive and exalted in the eternal, spiritual realm.

What we were is unmistakable. Understanding comes easily because we had first-hand experience. What we are, less so, for it has not yet been fully revealed. We know what sin is **and what sin does, but we've only** tasted of glory. Consequently, many believers and churches wrongly build their Christian lives around the familiar. A sin-conscious Christianity is a **debilitating snare because we no longer are who and what we once were. It's an identity issue.**

Note that while there was nothing intrinsically redeemable about anything we were (by nature objects of wrath), **we were never actual objects of wrath. "For God so loved the world" that "while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us".**

There was nothing lovable about us, but God loved us. He has loved the utterly unlovable.

- Everything changed because of who God is, and because of what God did:
[Ephesians 2:4-7](#)

God is love. He is good. He is rich in mercy. And so, instead of treating us as our sins deserved, **He substituted Himself for us, in order that He could deal with us according to His Son's obedience.**

Take careful note of who did the work. We were dead, and corpses contribute nothing to their own resurrection. **Just as Holy Spirit was first into Jesus's tomb on resurrection Sunday, so** Holy Spirit invaded the lives of dead sinners, bringing salvation. We are responders; He is the initiator.

We must get crystal clear on the binary nature of our salvation. True Christianity is identity driven. We are either dead in our transgressions and sins (and look like Jesus in the tomb), or we are alive in Christ and seated in heavenly places far above all else, forever (like Jesus is today). He descended to the lowest place in order that we might be installed in the same highest place He ascended to. There is no in-between. It's one or the other, no blended option. **Self-righteousness is utter darkness and the gift of Christ's righteousness perfect light.** Either/or, and never both/and.

He is the ultimate beneficiary. We benefit enormously from our salvation, but He will benefit for all eternity, His nature and power on display, revealed in and through us. He will be forever glorified by what He has done in us and through us. He took those who could not help themselves in any way and made us just like Himself in every way. Objects of wrath are now sons of God, thanks to His outrageous love, and by His immeasurable power, all for His infinite glory!

When God recreated you in Christ Jesus, you are a new creation, a new specie, not old Adam, but like Jesus. **We've been given a** salvation that is far beyond what we can begin to imagine. When we develop the theme of who we were, we can believe it because we were it. When we try preach an accurate representation of who we now are, nobody can conceive of it because the Scriptures tell us that its not yet been fully revealed, but when we see Him we will like Him. But right now, already, you and I have stepped into the powers of the age to come. We are on the other side of Christ's resurrection. When he came out of the tomb, you came out of the tomb with Him. When he came out of the tomb, you came out of your trespasses and sins. When He came out of death, you came out of death and as He walked into life, you walked into life and you are in Him.

- Christianity is through faith:
Ephesians 2:8-9

Language is complex. When we're dealing with Scripture, we're dealing with issues of translation on top of the thought forms and grammatical complexities that language involves. The net result is that good grammar can be poor theology. The distinction between believing in Jesus (good grammar, yet implying mental assent) and believing into Jesus (poor grammar, but sound doctrine) illustrates this perfectly.

The Gospel is a radical proposition. When we believe, His story becomes our story. In a moment we are united with Him. In the framework of Romans, we are co-crucified, co-died, co-buried, co-raised, co-ascended, co-seated, and co-labouring co-heirs.

We are not just believers in Jesus, we are believers into Jesus, because it's who we become.

Many a passage of Scripture refers to people living or walking by faith. Good grammar, and even doctrinally sound in that it accurately describes how things operate from our subjective perspective. Yet it is more accurate to understand this as living and walking through faith, because faith is always anchored in grace.

In the bigger picture, faith does not stand alone and doesn't do anything separated from grace. Faith is responding to what God has already done. It **feels like we're taking initiative**, but it's not. The work is done. It's by grace, a free gift so none of us can boast. It's not by discount or some 70/30 deal. He did it all! When this good news that He did it all touches our hearts, faith arises and we want to jump up and confess with our mouths. That response sweeps us into what grace has already provided.

Even when we consider the rewards of obedience, everything necessary to obey is provided first. That includes faith, peace, joy, power, gifts and callings, money. None of this is ever of ourselves, so that we are never able to boast.

- **Christ's workmanship created for good works:**
Ephesians 2:10

The Gospel is an outrageous proposition. It is a work of God with a God-sized result. It cannot be balanced out or moderated, but only under-stated, diluted, polluted, and otherwise compromised. **Christ's sinless life, substitutionary death, and triumphant resurrection was a once-for-all and definitive work. The truth is "exceedingly abundantly above all we can ask or imagine".**

What we were is clear. We were dead in our transgressions and sins, just like Jesus in the tomb. What we are is much more difficult for us to conceive of. We are alive in Christ and seated in heavenly places, in Him and with Him. Even more than that, we are just like Jesus as He is now. He is the forerunner of a whole new specie. We are last Adams all, just as we were once first **Adams all. That's not to say we're divine, but we are partakers in the divine nature. We have been born of God, of imperishable seed, and we are sons of God, whom the Son of God has been pleased to call brothers, and who He is bringing to glory. And yes, we are a work in progress – when we see Him, we shall be like Him – but we are nevertheless an extraordinary work of God right now. A work of God, of glory, and of the age to come. Because of this He sees us very differently to the way in which we see ourselves, and guess who is wrong!**

Examples are many. We are one with God. He is near. We have already died and gone to heaven. We, individually and corporately, are temples. We are open heavens right here on earth. Everything that Jesus did, we can do. As a collective – gifts and callings differ, and we are the new man in his fullness corporately – but Jesus Himself was clear about His being our pattern case. We are loved just as He was loved, one with God, just as He was, and have been sent just as He was sent.

None of this is pie-in-the-sky stuff; it is all steak-on-the-plate stuff. Heaven “earths” as His kingdom comes and His will is done, on earth as it is in heaven, in and through us. Not exclusively through us (He is not limited to us), but significantly through us.

Heaven “earths” as we walk in the good works which He has prepared in advance for us to walk in. This is true across every facet of life. If you’re married, loving your spouse well is one of the good works prepared by Jesus for you to do. The same applies to parenting, and/or caring for your parents and wider family. You are as called to your family as to your neighbourhood as to your job as to your local church. All work is a holy calling! And in it all, as we go, we share the Gospel of the kingdom, in words, works, ways and wonders!

The challenge for the church is not so much to overcome rank unbelief as to correct paralyzing **misbelief**. **It’s not that we don’t believe; it’s that we** believe things that have been unhelpfully entrenched in Christianity over the millennia, rather than God and His Word.

Discussion questions:

1. How much of your thinking revolves around who you were, rather than who you now are in Christ? If you centred your thinking around your true identity, what impact do you think it would have in and through you?
2. Christians are in two realms at the same time. **We’re here on earth, and we’re in heavenly places.** To what degree are you aware of this reality, and what would happen if you were consistently more aware?
3. Make a list of all the good works you already recognise as being prepared by God for you to walk in. Include every area of life, and name as many others as possible in the process, because good works often involve people, even if they seem to only revolve around things. What if you gave your life to doing these things for His glory?