

Dead or Alive

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[0 : 00] Well, this morning we have Nathan McKay, one of our ministers in training, and he's going to be preaching to us from Ephesians chapter 2. So I'd like you to turn, if you would now, to your Bibles, and we're going to read together Ephesians chapter 2 and the first 10 verses.

And this comes straight after Paul's desire in prayer for the Ephesian people, that their eyes would be opened to the glory and the power of the risen Lord Jesus.

The last verse of chapter 1 says that God put all things under his feet, Christ's feet, and gave him as head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

And now he goes on to speak about how people, both Jews and Gentiles, have been brought as one into that body of Christ.

So Paul says in Ephesians 2 verse 1, And you, he's particularly speaking there to these Gentiles in Ephesus, You were dead in the trespasses and sins 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, among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the flesh and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath like the rest of mankind.

[1 : 49] But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, he made us alive together with Christ.

By grace you have been saved, and raised us up with him, and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness towards us in Christ Jesus.

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God. Not a result of work, so that no one may boast, for we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

Amen. And may God bless to us his word. Well, good morning, Calvin Grove. If you have your Bibles with you, it would be great if you could turn with me back to that passage that Willie read for us earlier.

Ephesians chapter 2, verses 1 to 10. And if you're using our church Bibles this morning, that's on page 976. So Ephesians chapter 2, verses 1 to 10.

[3 : 23] And that's on page 976 of our church Bibles. Now we've been very fortunate as a church family in the last year or so, because we've been able to celebrate a good number of church weddings.

The latest one being for Scott and Willie Anna. And so the newer husbands among us will be able to tell us something about what jewelers do on a regular basis.

The jeweler takes his sparkling diamond, and he holds it up against a black backdrop so that people can see just how brightly it shines.

And in our passage this morning, the apostle Paul is a jeweler. He takes the sparkling diamond of the gospel, and he holds it up to the Ephesians against the black backdrop of man's former condition outside of Christ so that the Ephesians could see just how brightly the gospel truly shines. Now chapter 2 of Ephesians is all about the church, about God's new humanity, made up of both Jews and Gentiles in Christ Jesus.

[4 : 46] Back in chapter 1, Paul prays that the Ephesians will grow in their comprehension of the amazing work that God is doing in them.

So now here in our passage, the first half of chapter 2, Paul reminds the Ephesians of the great work that God has already done in them.

Namely, God made them alive when they were spiritually dead. Paul in our passage wants to renew the Ephesians' sense of wonder and awe at this great kindness that God has shown towards them.

Now this is the Tron Church, and if you're new here, then having alliterative points in our sermons is kind of our thing. So this morning, we're going to unpack this very encouraging passage and its various implications for our lives under three alliterative headings.

the walk of the dead, verses 1 to 3, the work of the Lord, verses 4 to 7, the walk of the living, verses 8 to 10.

[6 : 10] So now let's turn to our first heading, the walk of the dead, verses 1 to 3. Now here in the chapter's opening section, Paul reminds the Christians in Ephesus of what they all were before they were Christians.

And what they all were, according to Paul, were dead people walking. Because prior to their conversion, the Ephesians were all spiritually dead, heading for hell, and there was nothing whatsoever that the Ephesians could do to rescue themselves.

Now at first glance, this dark opening section to chapter 2 appears to have just crash-landed here in Paul's letter. Because everything else that Paul says prior to it, back in chapter 1, is just so encouraging for the Ephesians.

Throughout the whole of chapter 1, Paul makes it clear that he has the highest regard for the Christians in Ephesus. So now the question before us is why would Paul the Apostle now burden the hearts of these faithful Ephesian Christians by reminding them here in chapter 2's opening section of what they all were before they were Christians.

Why would Paul remind them of their dreadful past outside of Christ? Well friends, the answer to this question is certainly not that Paul just wanted to make the Ephesians feel bad about themselves as an end in itself.

[7 : 57] But rather the answer to this question is that Paul reminds the Ephesians of how desperate their previous fallen, walking dead state was prior to their conversion so that they could then be filled with wonder and awe at the good news that God has graciously remedied their previous fallen, walking dead condition by bringing them out of their state of death into a brand new state of life.

Because you see friends, Paul the Apostle was wise enough to know that we Christians shall never fully grasp the sheer awesomeness of what God has done for us unless we first comprehend the severity of our own sin and of what we all were back when we were all outside of Christ.

So friends, verses 1 to 3 of chapter 2 are crucial for us here to know well. Because these words do not merely describe what the Ephesians were like before they were Christians, but rather these words describe what all of us were like before we were Christians.

Us here this morning. This right here is a description of what we were all like by our very nature when we were left alone without God's gracious intervention into our lives to change us.

So friends, these words in verses 1 to 3 might be difficult for us here to swallow. But remember, these dark words are ultimately here for our benefit.

[9 : 48] because if we can make it through these emotionally difficult verses, then we'll be able to be overwhelmed with joy and knowing that God has rescued us all from our previous walking dead condition.

So therefore, Paul begins in verse 1 by saying, you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked. Now, Paul here is not merely saying that we are all guilty of having committed certain trespasses against God, although we certainly are.

Nor is Paul simply saying here that we have, in fact, all carried out given sins against the Lord, although surely we have done.

But rather, Paul here is saying that there was a time when we here this morning were actually dead in these things, our trespasses and sins before we were Christians.

Because you see, friends, the Bible teaches us that God himself is the ultimate source of life in itself. And so to be cut off from God is to be cut off from life, to be spiritually dead.

[11 : 15] And so here in verse 1, Paul here is saying that our trespasses and our sins had cut us off from life-giving fellowship with God so that we were all spiritually dead.

And because we were all spiritually dead, Paul says in verse 2 that the way in which we would walk through this world was guaranteed to be mastered by three distinct sources of evil.

The first of which in verse 2 is that we were certain to walk through this world following the course of this world. Now you might ask at this point, what are the ways of the world?

Paul, just look around us. We live in an evil society. Just look at what it worships. Sex, money, good looks, celebrity and status.

Just think of the millions of people that you see on social media who are changing their diets to ensure that animals aren't killed but don't seem too bothered about the millions of babies being aborted every year.

[12 : 36] or look at the arrogance of our Scottish government in the last number of years. Arrogantly implementing policies that seem to suggest that gender is malleable as opposed to being fixed like God designed it.

Paul says here that when we were outside of Christ it was the evil power of our environment's values and morals that would ultimately manipulate us.

And to make matters worse Paul says in verse 2 that the world was not the only evil force that mastered our walking dead lives but rather Paul says that secondly outside of Christ we were all certain to walk through this world following the prince of the power of the air.

or as you and I might know him better the devil or Satan. Paul says that we here this morning before we were Christians were not merely subject to the influence of the world but rather we were also subject to the influence of an evil supernatural being to Satan's influence.

The devil himself was at work in each one of us he was gradually molding us to conform us to be more and more like him to be more and more disobedient to God just as he is himself.

[14 : 16] So much so that Paul says again in verse 2 that we were in fact not children of God but the sons of disobedience.

and just when we think that Paul really ought to stop now he says in verse 3 that when we were all outside of Christ we were all certain to walk through this world following the passions of our flesh. Paul here is saying that all of us once lived solely for the purpose of gratifying the cravings of our own simple nature and because this was so he says again in verse 3 that we were by nature children of wrath like the rest of mankind.

We were intrinsically deserving of God's punishment. Now friends Paul's description of our fallen condition makes for painful reading but it does have a few helpful implications for our lives today. So we'll now look at three of these. The first of which is that people are not morally neutral. The Bible says that our hearts are evil.

[15 : 41] We are in bondage to evil. You'll sometimes hear celebrities say things like follow your heart. Or you might hear teachers say to children at school be true to yourself.

Well friends I hate to say it but this is all terrible advice. Our human condition outside of Christ is exactly what Paul has said it is in these opening three verses.

People are not morally neutral. People are evil by their very nature. And secondly this passage is here to act as a steel hammer to smash our own pride.

Paul's words here should greatly humble us because they show us how weak and lost we all really were before God saved us. Any sense of superiority that we might find ourselves feeling over others in our church family or indeed over others outside of it ought to be crushed because if it weren't for God's intervention then we'd merely be the children of wrath that Paul describes in these verses. And thirdly Paul's diagnosis of fallen humanity shows that human beings can't save themselves. We can't save ourselves from our walking dead state.

[17 : 13] A dead person can't revive himself. When was the last time that you saw a dead person say oh gosh I'm dead I better get myself out of this situation get myself back to life again.

Well Paul says that we can't bring ourselves back to spiritual life. Outside of Christ we are all spiritually dead and there is nothing we can do to save ourselves.

Now if Paul's pen had run out of ink at this point then perhaps Ephesians 2 would be unbearable for us to truly take in but thankfully friends Paul isn't quite finished.

What is to become of these walking dead creatures these children of wrath? Are they to be punished in hell forever just like they deserve? Amazingly Paul tells us in verses 4 to 7 that we were not punished when we were dead in our sin but rather God has done a great work of kindness in us and so now we move on to our second heading the work of the Lord verses 4 to 7 Now what was this great work that God did for us?

Well friends it was twofold Paul says that we were made alive with Christ in verses 4 and 5 so that we could share in Christ verses 6 to 7 So let's now unpack these two undeserved blessings that God has bestowed upon us the first of which is that we were made alive with Christ verses 4 and 5 now here in verse 4 Paul begins with the word but and this word but marks the great turning point of our chapter verse 4 comes in as the great light at the end of the dark long tunnel that is verses 1 to

3 and so Paul writes in verses 4 to 5 but God being rich in mercy because of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead in our trespasses made us alive together with [19:47] Christ now you see friends Paul wants the Ephesians to see that the only real reason that they escaped such a horrendous former walking dead condition is because God himself has freely chosen to rescue them and some people might say well surely there was something special about the Ephesians surely they did something to earn such an astonishing gift from God himself well Paul anticipated such questions and so he counteracted them by making it clear that God made these dead sinners alive simply because verse four he is rich in mercy simply because verse four again of his great love for us and so neither the

Christians back in Ephesus nor the Christians here in Glasgow were saved by God because of anything good that we had done not when we finally got our act together not when we finally did enough good deeds because we could not do any good deeds we were all dead dead people can't do good things dead people can't do anything but instead Paul says in verse five by grace you have been saved or just in case we didn't get his point the first time he says again in verse eight by grace you have been saved but not only has God made us alive not only has God forgiven us for our sins but he's also showered us in undeserved blessings he made us alive with

Christ so that we could share in Christ in verses six and seven now here in verse six Paul finishes this phrase with the phrase in Christ Jesus now that phrase in Christ is a very Ephesian saying it does appear a lot in many of the other Pauline letters but Ephesians here is no exception I think it occurs about fifteen times if any of you can find more instances than that then I'll personally buy you some chocolate now it's crucial for us here to recognize that being in Christ is not the same thing as having an opinion about Christ Christ nor is a kind of intellectual respect for

Christ but rather when Paul speaks about us being in Christ Jesus he is speaking about us being united to Christ connected to him so that by virtue of our union with Christ we can all actually share and the great blessings that God himself has bestowed upon Christ what God has done for Christ he has done for us also because we are all now in Christ and so just as God raised Christ from his physical death so too Paul says in verse 6 God raised us up with him from our spiritual death and just as God seated Christ in the heavenly places after his victory over sin and death so too Paul says in verse 6 that God has seated us with him in the heavenly places to share in Christ's victory our church's former senior minister Sinclair Ferguson comments in this verse he writes we are united to a risen ascended and enthroned Christ and therefore we already share in his triumph this is what Paul means by our being seated with Christ in the heavenly places now friends we must know that we have these great blessings because in our world today it might not look like this is the case in our world today it might look as if Christians are all on the losing side when we see church attendance plummeting here in Scotland when we see the enemies of the gospel calling the shots in our nation when we see

[24:59] Christ and the Christian worldview being mocked constantly in the media it really doesn't look as if the Christians are winning does it but God's word says that Christ has already risen from death and now he sits on his throne in triumph this is objectively true and we as those made alive with him and now united to him already share in Christ's triumph so friends do be encouraged because the truth of the matter is that Christ has already won despite how things might look and we all get to share in Christ's victory through our union with him what kindness it is that God has shown towards us and if that's not spectacular enough in verse 7 we learn a bit more of

God's kindness towards us Paul says here that God has done all of this for us to show off his grace the gospel of Christ is not merely about how we are saved but we see in verse 7 that it's all about bringing glory to God himself God has saved us so that when Jesus returns as Paul puts it here in verse 7 in the coming ages he might show off his grace so that everyone and everything will go wow what an amazing God that those Christians had all of this time what an encouragement for us when it looks like we're losing but friends God didn't make us alive again so that we could just sit and do nothing how ridiculous would it be if a dead man somehow came back to life had a second go at living and then just sat on the couch and watched

Netflix all day no friends in our third and final section verses 8 to 10 Paul tells us how we are to walk as God's new living people and that's our third and final heading the walk of the living verses 8 to 10 now here in our third and final section Paul makes it clear that our good works are not irrelevant to God in fact Paul says here that God made us alive for the very purpose of doing good works now again the good things that we've done were not in any way needed for us to be saved Paul's made

that clear and he says so again in this section Paul reiterates the point in verse 8 and verse 9 and this is not your own doing it is the gift of God not a result of works so that no one may boast but then look at what Paul says later in verse 10 he writes for we are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them friends Paul wants the Ephesians to see in this section that there should be some evidence that God has made them alive and that necessary evidence according to Paul is that the Ephesians should now be walking through life and the good works that God has prepared for them to do back in verse three Paul said that the Ephesians used to walk in their trespasses and sins back when they were spiritually dead but now that they are alive in Christ Paul says in verse 10 that they should now walk in good works like the Aerosmith song says walk this way now Paul here is not calling us to a life of sinless perfection but what he is saying is that God's new living people should now be leading a lifestyle that is distinctly different from the lifestyle we led back when we were spiritually dead Paul says again in verse 10 that we are God's workmanship we are now the product of his handiwork and so God's workmanship must reflect God himself and the good things we do now you might ask at this point what sort of good things must I do as God's workmanship well if this is your question and if you're a keen Bible nerd then go home and read chapter 4 onwards because in there Paul unpacks all the moral behavior that comes with being a part of [30 : 15] God's new humanity we Christians have already been saved and made alive with Christ so therefore Paul says to us live like it be what you are we here this morning are already God's children who have been shown immeasurable grace so now Paul says to us lead your new life under your new identity and in every part of your life from public life to private life from speech to sexuality from life at work to life at home everything in our lives should be used for God's glory and be shaped by his grace Paul says in verse one of chapter four I urge you to walk in a manner worthy of your calling because God's church his new humanity we are to live differently from the walking dead world that is all around us so that we can show off God's glory in the midst of it all so friends Ephesians chapter two is all about the church about God's new humanity and in our passage today Paul is a jeweler he takes the sparkling diamond that is the gospel and he holds it up against the black backdrop that is our fallen condition before we were Christians so that we could marvel anew at the amazing kindness of what God has done for us God made us alive when we were spiritually dead amen let's pray together father god we acknowledge before you that when we were outside of christ we were dead and our sins of trust and trespasses following the course of this world the prince of the power of the air and bondage to the desires of our flesh and so we thank you that you've now made us alive and showered us in blessings help us to leave this morning and walk as the new people you've made us in Jesus name we pray amen to