

Created for Good Works in Christ

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[0 : 0 0] We are created for good works. Let's be clear, that is in our DNA. That is what God has set in us. That is the reset button for us all to do good works that are in Christ. We are created for good works in Christ as part of the body of Christ. We are part of one body.

And yet Christians, I don't know whether you might have noticed this if you've listened to the radio this morning, have a propensity to squabble and get diverted from what our intended purpose is. Has it always been this way? Isn't it a shame that there's something in us that actually takes us away from God's purposes? And this morning throughout the Bible it has riven through with God's people who have consistently, time and time again, age after age, have failed to fulfill that call on God's life that is created for good works. Our scripture this morning is something sometimes called the Magna Carta of God's grace, Ephesians 2, 1 to 10. And this scripture in 10 small verses actually leads us and reminds us of the great works that Jesus has done in the lives of those who love him and know him. It's an encouraging scripture for us. The amazing work he has done in my life and in your life and continues to do. So he's not done yet. Be encouraged. He hasn't finished his work in us and through us. No matter what age or situation before that we are in, his work continues.

You might have noticed on a Sunday to Sunday now there's Bibles at the back and there's some notes. And if on a Sunday you feel that you sort of go away like I do sometimes and think, oh what was that that was said? There's going to be notes at the back that you can take when you can come in and make notes through the sermon to take away maybe to your small group during the week or home group however you meet. But in the scripture this morning there's this before and after. I don't know whether you've seen those adverts on the television. There's always the before isn't there and then there's the after.

It's normally used to sell dietary products and maybe lifestyle products where we look probably at sadly the most discouraging picture that they can put on the screen of somebody and then transformationally amazingly the after product is somebody looks totally photoshopped into a totally different beginning. The before and after picture. Well the good news is in our reading this morning is there is a before and after. The scripture from Ephesians gives us two pictures, one before Christ and one after, verses 1 to 3 and then 4 to 7. But then Paul brings it all together in verses 8 to 10 and tells us why we need to see these comparisons. So let's go with the before. The before picture isn't very flattering. Paul says that we are in death, we are dead. Worse still we are spiritually dead.

That there is that sense, it's hard to imagine it being much worse and as the result of sin, because sin kills and destroys. It annihilates. That is what sin does. Sin seeks to deceive us from the authority of God's word in the Bible. It's trying to remove God from our education system, remove morality and virtue out of literature and the media. It's removing ethics out of business, fidelity out of marriage, you name it. Sin kills it, tries to destroy it. It's the culture. So we bend our culture and pretend that it's okay. And we know that it's not, because that's not what we were created for.

[4 : 37] And the second part of the description that Paul says is about following the world. It is just so easy to be like sheep. As it said, we all actually have been sheep and gone astray, each of us to his own way. And yet the Lord has laid upon him the iniquity of all our sin. It's worth stopping to notice that Paul also includes this idea of slavery, being slavery to our cravings. And we will all maybe know what that is like, you know, to, it's so easy to fall in with what our needs or we think what our needs are, to fit in with the culture of which we are in. The world, the environment, our culture, I can probably give you an example of how our culture and society seeks to normalise or even, in some ways, glamourise sin. You only have to look at celebrity culture. You know, what is our young people seeking to achieve? Are they seeking to achieve something or just quick, short-term celebrity that isn't going to last that long? There's lust, greed. I could go on, but you get the picture. And J.B. Phillips paraphrases Romans 12 too, that familiar verse, do not be conformed any long to the pattern of the pattern of this world. And Philip says, do not let the world squeeze you into its mould.

Don't let the world squeeze you into that mould. Then, of course, Paul talks about the evil one. He talks about the spiritual forces, the realms they're in.

And so it's not surprising that Paul mentions it here, probably more than any other. The evil one is a great deceiver, will deceive us. And then, then, of course, there's the flesh to which we are enslaved, our sinful nature that becomes obsessive and harmful to our own lives, the world, the flesh, and the devil.

Paul doesn't ignore that. That's the before. Then we come to the good news. And there is good news, and it starts in verse 4.

And the good news is that we are of value, that we are known and loved by God. Each one of us is valued. There is value in it. If we weren't valuable to God, he wouldn't have sent Jesus to die for us. And some of us need to remind ourselves each day about that.

[7 : 16] We are of value to him in each and every way in which we are called to share our lives. People that we care about, people we love, desperately to know exactly what Paul is to tell us in his next few verses.

But here in verse 4, one of the great words of Scripture, but. But is a great word. But because of his great love for us.

But because of his great love for us. For those feeling hopeless, helpless, and discouraged, overwhelmed, how far, by how far sometimes we can feel from God's standards.

And then we come to this word, but. All I have just said is true, but you are not without hope. But there is more. But God has made a way.

It's good news for us. It's good news for the people then, it's good news for us now. And the next three verses describe that change that comes through Christ.

[8 : 24] This is the after picture for each and every one of us. Because Christ died for us. The change that takes place through Jesus Christ. Because it shows that we are created for his good and perfect will.

The focus is once again, all about God and us in relationship. Heart change can only come through the working of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

And we need to ask more and more for that. Day by day by day, minute by minute. As we seek to do that thing which we are called to do.

Is God's good and perfect will. One of the images in the Bible describes this change. And it is the exact thing of a rebirth of new life. Born again.

And it can happen time and time and time again. You should not be carrying those things that define us from the past. That is the after picture.

- [9 : 23] The today picture is we are defined by our lives in Christ. Him in us. That we are made alive.
- Paul mentioned both God's love and God's great love. He emphasizes this, this great love and rich mercy for each and every one of us.
- We are made alive. Paul begins by describing us as dead. It is only logical then that the first thing is in Christ. We are made alive. We are made alive. We were dead. Now we're alive.
- This is our testimony. This is our witness. This is what we take into the everyday. This is what we share with people. We are alive. We are alive in Christ. And we can laugh.
- We can have joy. We can smile at people. Thank you. For those listening to the podcast, I hope you felt the energy of that smile.
- [10 : 22] We are raised with Christ. This is our testimony. We are saved by grace and then raised with Christ. God raised up Jesus and seated at the right hand in the same way.
- And Jesus' having been given power over everything exalts us through grace. Why would God do such a thing?
- Why would he do that for us? The answer is here. In order that in the coming ages, we might show the incomparable riches of his grace, him through us.
- We are the witnesses. We are the witnesses. We do this today. This is what we're called to do. Expressed in his kindness to us as in Jesus Christ. God did this to show the world what he is like in us and through us.
- Isn't that great? We go out from here and we are ambassadors. And people will look at us and say, Amen. I heard somebody say Amen.
- [11 : 24] We can say Amen. You know, God did this. Let me ask a searching question. When the world looks at us, do they see the incomparable riches of his grace expressed in the kindness of us in Jesus Christ?
- Because that's what the world's looking for at the moment. When people look at us, is that what they see? People need to see in us the incomparable riches of his grace expressed in kindness.
- My prayer for each and every one is that we would go out from here filled afresh with that knowledge and confidence of what has been placed in us and through us.
- For by grace through faith, another part of the after picture is that by grace through faith, we are saved. We are saved. We have that confidence. This brings us to the heart of the gospel.
- And what is often seen is the heart of the book of Ephesians in 8 to 9. And they succinctly and powerfully state this incredible message for us that Paul wants us to, those Ephesian church today, but for us as well.
- [12 : 32] For it is by grace that you have been saved through faith. And this is not from yourselves. It is a gift of God. Not by works so that no one can boast.
- This isn't what I did for myself. You know, we're not like McDonald's. We don't get different stars. How much we have achieved.
- We are all called. We are all saved. Not by works so that we can boast about it. A boast in Jesus Christ. What more needs to be said?
- God's grace offers it. We receive it by faith. It is simply a gift to believe and accept it. To be asked for and not earned. Do you struggle with that?
- You know, I've met part of my Christian life maybe earlier was to feel as though I had to earn something. You know, I had to tick the boxes.

[13 : 33] That's not at all. We live by grace. And that's why we're free. This freedom that we talk about. Maybe you want to take away that verse 8 to 9.

Memorize it this week. Put it on your fridge. Put it on a screensaver. Write it on your hand. Put it on the inside of your glasses. Whatever you need to remember that this is what God is saying to us.

And finally, we are God's workmanship. I don't know whether you have made anything and you sit there and you look at it and you think, Ah, do you know what?

That was good. That was really good. We are part of God's workmanship. We need to be encouraged more and more that God looks at us and says, You are part of my workmanship.

You are amazing. And what I'm calling you to do and empowered by the power of the Holy Spirit in us. The idea of craftsmanship. And that is what we are. Craftsmanship of God.

[14 : 37] It took me to a verse in Isaiah. And it's on the screen. In Isaiah, it says, Listen to me, you islands.

Hear this, you distant nations. Before I was born, the Lord called me. From my mother's womb, he has spoken my name.

He made my mouth like a sharpened sword. In the shadow of his hand, he hid me. He made me into a polished arrow and concealed me in his quiver. He said to me, You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will display my splendor.

But I said, I have labored in vain. Anybody put their hand up to that? I have labored in vain with this. I've tried to do it in my own strength.

I've labored in vain. I've spent my strength for nothing at all. Yet what is due to me is in the Lord's hand. And my reward is with my God.

[15 : 39] For you have made me a polished arrow. I don't know whether you've ever looked at an arrow. This one mocked together.

The thing about an arrow is when you find this arrow, and if you think about an arrow being our life, it doesn't come straight off the tree made like this.

It has to be shaped and fashioned. And sometimes that will mean some things need cutting away. That means that some things that we have held dear to where our grafting was needs to go in order to make this straight.

I'll leave that between you and God to know what those things are in each of our lives. I can think of the things that need cutting away in mine from time to time and the things that get attached.

We need to be that straight. And of course, with the archer, of course, the purpose is that we need that balance. It's no good just having this lovely, amazing, straight thing, because when it goes out, it needs balance.

[16 : 50] And the balance is Scripture. The balance is the Bible. We need to come back to that again and again and again, as we have this morning, to get that balance in Scripture so that we don't go off all over the place, as we tend to do.

It's that balance in Scripture. But the interesting thing is about the tip. Now, I don't know, I was from a certain age where boys made bows and arrows.

I don't know whether they do that these days, but we did because we were poor. But now we are rich in Christ. Hooray! But now, we would just like cut off the end.

And you just knew that when it was going to hit, and it was just going to bounce off. In our arrow, you'll notice that the tip is added. It's the power of the Holy Spirit added into our lives, penetrating power to actually engage with the purposes of God in our life, so that when he sends us, we don't just bounce off.

We actually have penetrating power to make a difference to the kingdom that he has called us to serve. Penetrating power. Penetrating power. But then the reading says, you have placed me in your quiver.

[18 : 21] You know, and for many of us, we will say, well, I've got my life straight, Lord. I'm getting here. I've got the balance of Scripture. I'm filled with the Holy Spirit.

Wow! But then I'm in this dark quiver. I'm in this place. Why have you placed me there? The thing is, I want to reassure you, if you are in that place today, that you're in that place because I can assure you that the archer straps his arrows close to his chest.

They are close, and they are ready to go. They're not left in a Marks and Spencers, Sainsbury's, or Tesco bag, ages away. Oh, where did I put my arrows?

Where did I do that? They are strapped to his chest, close to his heart, so that when the Lord sends, and the Lord prompts us, we are ready to go.

For you have made me a polished arrow. I'd love you to take this image with you this week. For those things that we need to clear away, to make us straight.

[19 : 35] For those balance of scripture that we need in our life, but also this power and penetrating tip of the Holy Spirit in all that we do. For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

We may feel we're in a dark quiver, but the Lord has got opportunities for each and every one of us this week. We may not see the opportunities, but God will show us.

Maybe it's going to be at Tesco's, at the checkout, talking to somebody. Maybe it's going to be in the street. Maybe it's in our workplace. Maybe it's with a friend. Maybe it's with a family member.

But we are created for good works and to share this. You see, the arrow is, this arrow is for us to do good works.

He has laid out the opportunities in front of us to live out this purpose. And my prayer is that Holy Spirit would reveal to each and every one of us what our scripture is saying to us today.

[20 : 45] In our lives, that we are created for good works. In Christ Jesus. Are you encouraged by that? For the podcast, people are nodding.

And then they laughed. And then they said, yes! Well done. Should we pray together? Thanks to you. Holy Spirit, you have created us for good works.

Holy Spirit, would you come and would you embed this scripture in our hearts this week? Would you give us a fresh confidence that always comes from you? To live for you, to serve you, to worship you.

And Father, we thank you for the blessings that we have seen in our lives through your good works. The blessings that we have seen and the blessings you are about to show us in every stage of our lives.

So Holy Spirit, so Holy Spirit, seize our attention, we pray. In Jesus' name, Amen.

[22 : 02] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.