

# From Death to Life

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- [ 0 : 00 ] If you have your Bibles, open back up to Ephesians chapter 2. We're in the middle of a series on the book of Ephesians that is describing God's new society.
- God's new society. We want to talk about what does it mean to be a healthy gospel church through what Paul describes in this letter. We planned this preaching series and who would preach what before we decided anything about talking about church planting.
- So all I've got to say is it's good we weren't doing a series on the book of Judges. And we were in Judges 4 and J.L. puts a tent peg through Sisera's head. I don't know how I would apply that to church planting.
- But we have to do some gymnastics there. But this passage is no problem because this passage describes the gospel.
- And the heart of church planting is the gospel of Jesus Christ. Colin mentioned last week at the beginning of his sermon, thought it was so good. He said there's a difference between knowing something and experiencing it.
- [ 1 : 07 ] There's a difference between knowing and experiencing something. And we could say in the same way, there is a difference between having read Ephesians 2, 1 through 10 before and being able to get an A grade on a test describing the doctrinal truth that's expounded by Paul here.
- There's a huge difference between that and actually knowing the power personally in your own life of Ephesians 2, 1 through 10. Because when you don't just know this, but you experience this reality, new possibilities open up.
- Before we talk about it though, let me pray for the preaching of God's word. Father, we ask that you give us ears to hear, minds to understand, hearts to love, hands and voices to respond to your word.
- And we pray this in the precious name of Jesus. Amen. So the Apostle Paul isn't afraid of a run-on sentence. When, if you look in the Greek, in chapter 1, verses 3 to 14, guess how many sentences it is in the original Greek.
- One. We have to break it up in the English translation so we can make sense of it and follow what he's saying. Last week's sermon on Ephesians 1, verses 15 to 23, look down, you see how big a chunk that is.
- [ 2 : 28 ] Guess how many sentences that is in the original Greek. One. In our passage, the first seven verses, guess how many sentences it is in the original Greek.
- One. One. We have to break it up so we can make sense of it. But Paul, it's like Paul doesn't have a second to take a breath and add a full stop.
- Why? Because his breath is taken away by the beauty and the glory of knowing God through Christ Jesus. The gospel has taken his breath away.
- And so what you get in Ephesians, it is just jam-packed with truth and glory and wonder. You know, Americans, I know we are very much prone to hyperbole.
- Everything's awesome and amazing. I mean, you just mentioned taxation without representation and I will dump all of your tea into the Boston Harbor, right?

[ 3 : 33 ] But even an American can't match the wonder that Paul has at the gospel. And we could apply this passage in so many different ways.

It applies to so much of church life because it's the core of what we believe and the hope that we have. And this morning, though, I just want to apply it to church planting. Why? Plant churches. And here's the three reasons from this passage.

One, because the need is great. Two, because God's love and grace is bigger. And three, because God has created us for good works. First thing, because the need is great.

Paul starts our passage with the word and in verse 1. He's connecting back to this previous section. He's talking about the hope and the power and the blessing of being in Christ.

And he takes a pause and he goes back and he reminds the Ephesians how they got to the point of actually being in Christ. He backtracks a little bit.

[ 4 : 35 ] Rather than always being in Christ, verse 1, what does he say they used to be in? Trespasses and sins. This way of being in sin is something that the world is accustomed to, something that we get accustomed to too much.

You know, it's like there is a smell blindness to the stench of sin. Aaron and I started dating. I lived with three other 20-year-old guys in a flat.

And she would walk in and ask, what's that smell? And we'd say, I don't know what you're talking about. What on earth? It just smells like man in here, that's all, right? We didn't know.

We were accustomed to the dirty dishes and the smelly laundry, the strange scents that emanated from the furniture. In the same way, what Paul is describing is we live with the reality of sin in our life and we get so used to it.

That we don't even bat an eye at gossip and slander. When people use words to tear down other people. Lying and broken relationships. Hurt. They're not feeling like there's any need for God.

[ 5 : 44 ] Death. They just become normal to us. We're blind to it because we are in sin before we're in Christ. Imagine for a second you walk into a doctor's office.

Something's been plaguing you. And the doctor says, I got the test results back. It isn't very good. You say, oh no. What does it mean, doc? How bad is it?

He says, it's really bad. And you go, no. It's really bad? Tell me. Break it to me, doc. Give it to me straight. Do I have a year to live? Do I have six months? And he says, no. It's way worse than that.

You're dead. We can talk about sin like it's a bad case of the spiritual drowsies. Like all you need in your life is a little bit of spiritual caffeine.

And you'll be good. But Paul, what does he describe? He says, apart from Christ, you're a spiritual corpse unless God makes you alive. There is a difference between being dead and being ill.

[ 6 : 42 ] If you're just ill, there are different degrees. You can be a little bit ill, medium-sized, very ill. But dead is dead. You can drive a very nice Range Rover and look great.

But if you are not in Christ, Paul says you're dead in your sin. You can be a junkie on the streets of Glasgow, and if you are not in Christ, you are dead in your sin.

Why plant churches in places like Govan and the East End and in Bearsden, Milguy? Because no matter what station of life you are in, without Christ, Paul says you are dead in your sin.

What's the mission of Jesus as he comes? He announces good news to the poor. And he also calls rich tax collectors to come and to follow him. To the lame beggar, he says, do you want to be healed?

And to the rich young ruler, he challenges him. And he doesn't follow Jesus because he had great riches. And he walks away having so much but not having Jesus.

[ 7 : 51 ] I want to pretend like we're seeking to plant a church in Bearsden, Milguy, because we are the great hope that everyone needs. It's not about us. We're also not trying to pretend that there aren't faithful gospel churches in those areas.

Can I say this, though? As best we can do, you can argue with these numbers, maybe you don't know, but we tried to estimate what we would call a fellow evangelical Bible-believing church in that area. Attendance, and I think this is being generous, is around 400 on a Sunday morning.

There are 40,000 people who live in that area. That is 1% of the population. And now, of course, different people who live in those areas travel. They go to the Tron. People come and commute here into church.

So it could be more. But I don't think the average is going up that much. And it's anecdotal, but multiple families in our church have talked about their kids in primary and secondary schools, and they don't have a single Christian friend.

I'm simply trying to make the point that the need is great. Paul says in verses 1 and 2 that we are dead in sin. And not just dead, but that we're walking in death apart from Christ.

[ 8 : 54 ] This is the zombie verse in the Bible. The dead walking. And the claim that he makes about sin is that it kills you. And not only that, but sin also reigns.

It holds you in its grip. Verse 2. And lest we think Paul's whole point is he's just waving a smug finger at the pagans, right?

He uses these pronouns you and we. Meaning, yeah, you, Gentiles. But also, he says we. He's one of the Jews. One who knew all his doctrine.

He's saying you can grow up in the covenant people and still be dead in your sin. You can perform all these righteous acts. But if you haven't clung by grace through faith to Christ, you are dead.

Why does Paul spend this time describing people who are not in Christ? You know, is he like just being mean? Like, take it easy, Paul. Maybe you're thinking that. You're like, hey, I invited a non-Christian friend this morning.

[ 9 : 56 ] Hey, chill out. He wants us to know the great need. And because he's showing us that you will never truly understand and grasp the amazing grace of God until you actually understand your station in life apart from Christ.

Paul isn't afraid to offend because he wants you to be made alive and to know the power of that life. And the idea here is if you read this, you are not sitting in judgment being like, eh, I'm in Christ.

All you people aren't who aren't. You're so awful. No. That is where all of us were. This passage is saying we are no better than you apart from God's grace.

What can dead people do? Nothing. It's the message of this passage. God helps those who help themselves. No.

No. Dead people can't help themselves. What hope is there for the world? We just need a prescription of medicine, spiritual medicine to make us better.

[ 11 : 01 ] No, we need resurrection. That's the first thing. Why do we play in churches? Because the need is great. Second thing is because God's love and grace are even bigger than the need. Verse 4.

It starts with the two greatest, most sweet words in all of human history. But God. What the doctors couldn't do.

And the self-help gurus couldn't do. And the self-esteem coaches couldn't do. And man-made religion couldn't do. And self-righteousness couldn't do. And secular humanism couldn't do.

God did. God's grace intervenes. God did something. Verse 5. Even when we were dead, God made us alive together with Christ.

There's this pastor named Steve Brown and he used this illustration. He said, if you ever find a turtle on a fence post, you've got to ask, who put it there?

[12:00] Turtles don't climb fence. But if you find a turtle on a fence post, you've got to ask, how did it get there? It didn't get there on its own. Likewise, if you ever find a follower of Jesus Christ, you can know with 100% certainty that it didn't happen because of their own choosing or their own doing.

Why? Because salvation is from death to life. Every Christian who is sitting here right now is a turtle on a fence post. And was it because of something in us that God made us do, that made God do this?

No, verse 4, it was something in him. Right? It wasn't like, oh, I know, oh, yeah, no. That one. That one's kind of cute. I really want to judge him. But he's super cute.

I think I'll save him. No, verse 4. It was because of the great love with which he has loved us. Because God is love.

God loves. Paul really wants you to know how big God's love is. And he says in verse 8, it's not your own doing. Because if it was even a little bit of your goodness and your effort, guess what?

[13:12] That means you contribute something to your salvation. And you get to get the glory for that. You see, grace is a really threatening thing. Because if it says, the only way I can become a Christian is totally by the work of God, bringing me from death to life.

What does that mean? It's all of his grace. And you do not get any more claims on your life. You don't get to hold part of you like, okay, God, you did the 90%, but I did the 10%.

So can I kind of have like, can I corner this little bit off and make the decisions in my own life, what's best for me? No. It's threatening. Because if it's all of grace, wonder of wonder, it's of grace.

It puts you ultimately in his need. And that is a very hard thing because we want control. Here's a little bit. If there's Greek grammar nerds here this morning, you're like, there aren't.

Well, I'm going to say it anyways, okay? You know, sometimes we think when we hear that's by grace through faith. We're like, oh, God shows us grace. I do the work of faith. Right? God does his thing. I do my thing.

[14:15] Okay. In the Greek, grace and faith are both feminine nouns. Okay? But when Paul says this is the gift of God, that word this is a neuter pronoun.

You're like, who cares, right? The reason that matters is if it's a neuter pronoun, it's not just referring back to one thing. If it was a feminine pronoun, you could be like, ah, was he referring to grace or was he referring to faith?

But because it's a neuter pronoun, it means he's referring to the whole thing. The grace that he shows and the faith is all a gift from God.

Even when we respond in faith, we look back and we say, my Lord, I would not choose you. It would never be if your grace hadn't found me. The Holy Spirit makes us alive.

And the first movement of new life is faith in Christ. So what? So faith isn't a job promotion. Where God just looked at you and he's like, oh, this person's coming to church and they're putting a little overtime in.

[ 15 : 13 ] They're showing up early. They're staying late. I'm going to reward them with a life promotion. No, he comes to you in the midst of death. He saw us in our need. He loved us in our need.

And he pursued us in our need. And I don't know about you, but sometimes I ask, why me? Why me? I don't have a clue.

And some days it's really a struggle to believe that he does show me that sort of grace and he does love me like that. But then I come to Ephesians 2, verses 1 through 10. And wonder of wonders, I see that it is true.

And it doesn't just say that he loves. It says that he loves greatly. And he doesn't just love greatly, he loves you greatly. And he's rich in mercy. God doesn't have to check his mercy bank account to see if he's going to overdraft it when he pours it out.

There is a storehouse of mercy that will never run out. You don't have to hoard God's mercy. It's new every morning. You don't have to worry about it running out. You don't have to say, oh, it's only the first hundred people on Crow Road in through the doors.

[ 16 : 19 ] Those are the ones who get God's mercy. There is enough mercy for every person in Glasgow and in the whole world. That is how deep the mercy of God is.

Puritan Richard Sibbes wrote, there is more mercy in Christ than sin in us. And why did God do all of this? Verse 7. So that in the coming ages, he gets to show the immeasurable riches of his grace and kindness towards us in Christ Jesus.

He desires, he loves to display his grace through you. He longs to do that. We fear sometimes that he's not going to use us.

He doesn't want to use you. This passage says, no, that's not true. And sometimes we come and we hear about faith and you're like, that's just like, am I supposed to like just mentally assent to some facts?

And faith is not less than believing certain set of truths, but it's more than that. All these things are happening to the believer who is in Christ. Faith is not just believing things that are true.

[ 17 : 22 ] It is collapsing into the arms of Jesus. It's this relational embrace. We're united to him by faith. So we're raised from the dead with Christ, Paul says.

We're seated in the heavenly realms with Christ. His life becomes our life. His death becomes our death. His resurrection becomes our resurrection. His ethic is our ethic. His kingdom is our kingdom if you are in Christ.

Paul says in verse 9, none of this being made alive is a result of works so that no one may boast. You know, it really is such a bizarre thing that in denominations that emphasize the sovereignty and gracious initiative of God like ours, that there can be proud people like me in it.

If there is anything that should humble us, it is this doctrine. If we get these spheres humming, if Helensboro becomes a fully sanctioned charge, if anything ever becomes of Bears Den Mill Guy, it will not be because of our greatness or our goodness.

It is not for our glory. We are to display people, to show the glory of the God who brings the dead to life. Let me apply this in a couple ways before moving to our last point.

[ 18 : 40 ] First thing, we go to people. There is this biblical principle of grace initiates. God doesn't wait for us. He comes.

He pursues us. In the same way we go after people, whether it is in sharing our faith or starting new churches. Yes, you open the doors, right? You invite people here. You connect with people in the community.

But salvation compels us to go. To go. Because God's shown us grace. He took the first step and so do we. Second thing, you can take risks in church life.

If there is a God like this with this much power who desires to display his grace and mercy through us, you can take risks. Now, what I'm not trying to say, there's a whole book of the Bible called Proverbs that talks about wisdom and prudence.

You make decisions in the midst of community and leadership and things like that. But I think there is something off. If the only things we ever do in church are very manageable in our own power and don't need desperate kingdom prayer.

[ 19 : 50 ] I mean, ultimately, we need prayer for every little bit, even the small things, right? What does it say about our view of God? There is a big God that Paul is talking about in Ephesians 2.

Application number three. It doesn't have to do with church planting. But if you do not call yourself a follower of Jesus, my plea with you this morning is to come alive. And maybe you're sitting here going, what on earth are you talking about, Nate?

You just described the dead can't come to life. You're right. I can't do that. In fact, if this was up to me, it's the worst job in the world. I wouldn't be a minister, much less try to plant a church if this was up to me.

Terrible if it's up to me. If Ephesians 2 isn't true, let's stop. Let's quit. But if Ephesians 2 is true, that means that Jesus comes after people. And he brings them to life.

And so when I encourage you in this way and offer you this, I'm saying, who knows? Maybe before the foundation of the world, God has ordained this day right now, the one where he breathes life into your soul.

[ 20 : 58 ] And what do you do? You simply relent. And you fall in an embrace of the arms of Jesus. Which leads us to our last point. We plant churches because God's created us for works.

Paul says in verse 9, we're not saved by our works. He wants to make that known. But then in verse 10, what does he say? He says you're saved for works. You're not saved by your works, but you're saved for works.

We're not saved by our goodness, but God actually wants to do something good through you. So you can walk in them. Do you hear the comparison? Before being in Christ, walking in Christ.

Sin. Now being made live in Christ, walking in Christ in good works. The salvation that Jesus brings redirects our work to love of God and love of neighbor.

And mystery of mysteries, this sovereign, omnipotent God desires to use us in his kingdom. He wants to bring our purposes to bear through our work.

[ 22 : 01 ] What does Paul say that we are? We are God's workmanship. The Greek word there is poiema. It's where we get the English word poem from. Many of you, maybe you think you're a piece of work.

And God says, in Christ, you're a work of art. You're his poem. So what? To use a sports analogy, get on the pitch.

Don't sit in the stands. If you're alive in Christ, it's not ministers who do ministry. It is Christians. So get involved in ministry somehow.

I know many of you are already doing it. Maybe the encouragement is to continue on. I'm not talking about church planting right here. I'm talking about serving in the body of Christ. Serving one another.

And we plant churches so that more people can discover life in Christ. And discover the gifts that God's given them.

[ 23 : 04 ] And to use them. We don't try to start country clubs. Everybody comes together and we just share these little things in common.

And we talk a secret language. What's being described in Ephesians 2 is a new society. Based on the doing, the dying, the rising, and the coming again of Jesus Christ.

It is the most wonderful news in the world. And it changes everything. Thanks be to God. Amen. Amen.