

# God's sovereignty and salvation

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[ 0 : 00 ] Ephesians chapter 2 starting at verse 1. 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 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 works, 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.

Brilliant. Do keep that passage open. Ephesians chapter 2. There's an outline on the back of the server sheet, and it should come up on the screen as well as we go through. Imagine they made a film of your life.

[ 1 : 49 ] I wonder which actor you'd like to play you. Well, just imagine that the film does really well at the box office, and the critics love it. And so do the jury of the Oscars.

And you're there, and you win best film. Imagine that. And so you're there, you're quite emotional, and you walk up to the steps, and you get given your Oscar, and you stand in front of the microphone, and here's the question.

Who do you thank? Who gets the credit for your life? Perhaps let's narrow the question more. Who gets the credit for bringing these five young people to faith in Jesus?

That's the question we're going to think about this morning. As Phil said last week, we started looking at the topic of God's sovereignty, God being in charge over all things.

We saw last week that God is the creator, and so he has complete charge over everything, authority, all of creation, all of history, all of our lives. And yet we also saw that the choices we make in life are real choices that have real consequences.

[ 3 : 00 ] So last week was God's authority and sovereignty in general. Now we're going to think about God's sovereignty in the specific area of becoming a Christian, what the Bible calls salvation.

Now there's lots of passages I've put on the sheet, more than we have time to look at this morning, but they're there for us to be really convinced. So when it comes to being saved, when it comes to becoming a Christian, part of God's family, well, God is the one we thank.

Not just in a superficial way, like at an Oscars ceremony, but really thank. He is the one who gets the credit. Well, to see that, firstly, we have to start with ourselves.

And this is where we started in our passage. So firstly on the outline, we are not free to save ourselves. We are not free to save ourselves. I recently booked into a first aid course.

Many of you have done those before. Last time I did the course was during COVID. And so they had the COVID measures out, social distancing and everything, so much so that I had to put myself in the recovery position, which I didn't think was very realistic.

[ 4 : 11 ] But I also learned how to do CPR and how to use a defibrillator. Perhaps you've had to do CPR on someone or have used a defib.

I've probably seen it on TV or if not in real life. And it's obvious, isn't it, that when CPR and a defibrillator are needed, it's because the person is in a very perilous position.

The heart is not beating. And actually, that is the picture the Apostle Paul uses, the whole Bible uses as well, when it comes to describing our humanity's natural spiritual position before God.

Look down at the first reading, first verse from Ephesians 2. And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked.

Why are we not free to save ourselves? Because we're dead. We're spiritually dead in sin. Now, it is Euros fever.

[ 5 : 17 ] I don't know if that's your thing or not at the youth group. A lot of chat has been about the Euros. And we were quietly confident before Friday night.

But, yeah, it's still going to come home. It's fine. Don't worry. But perhaps you remember the last Euros. Perhaps you remember the story of Christian Eriksen during Denmark's opening game against Finland.

A throw-in comes in and he just falls over on the pitch. He collapses. It's quickly, it becomes very clear that something is very wrong.

He's lying motionless. Someone quickly, one of his teammates, grabs his tongue to stop him swallowing it. And the medics rush on. His heart has stopped beating.

He was technically dead. And when it comes to spiritual life, the Bible tells us that every human being is like Christian Eriksen, lying on the pitch.

[ 6 : 15 ] Not physically dead, but spiritually dead. Well, the verses here go on to explain what that kind of looks like. So have a look at verse 3. Among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind.

As you walk around school, as you walk around work and at Dulwich and other areas, people look alive. A lot of activity. But the Bible says they're like the walking dead.

Like spiritual zombies, if you like. To the naked eye alive, but to the spiritual eye, not just a bit ill, but dead. Living our own way. And what's the Bible called sin?

Following the passions and desires. Doing what we want to do. Saying no to God and living our own way. And just as Christian Eriksen couldn't save himself and make himself alive, we can't save ourselves and make ourselves alive to God either.

Why? Because we have that heart problem. Listen to the words of Jesus from Mark chapter 7, verse 21 to 23. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness.

[ 7 : 46 ] Foolishness. All these things come from within and they defile a person. The world knows that there are corrupting influences out there in life.

It's why there's been a right kind of call to kind of think about how social media and pulling, holding people to account for what they publish online. But actually our biggest problem is not what's out there, but what's in here, in my heart and everyone's heart.

Our hearts pump out this stuff that Jesus said, like sewage into the Thames. Evil thoughts, sexual immorality, envy, slander, pride, deceit. And this is actually how we start life.

As the five young people here this morning, as they're up the front, they were delightful, weren't they? I'm sure they are not always delightful. And I'm sure if they're anything like me, that when they were younger, they didn't have to be taught how to lie.

Didn't have to be taught how to cheat or how to be rude. It just comes very naturally to us all, doesn't it? I have a friend whose child's first word was no.

[ 9 : 03 ] I guess that's a challenge to the majority view that human beings are essentially good with just a few bad eggs. Or at least we're neutral.

We could go either way. The Bible is clear that human beings are not a blank piece of paper, but instead spiritually dead as we live our own way, not God's.

Yes, graciously, we're not as bad as we could be. We are capable of great acts of charity. And some people do do things that are a lot worse, humanly speaking, than others.

But the Bible makes clear that left to ourselves, we are dead to God because of sin. And if you wouldn't call yourself a Christian here this morning, well, that really is the starting point when it comes to who's in charge out of our salvation.

That's the starting point. We will never see our need of a rescue until we grasp that desperate situation. And as we've seen throughout our service already, that the heart of the Christian message is not try harder, keep the rules, and do your very best.

[ 10 : 11 ] Because none of us can, none of us can. None of us want to, in fact, left by ourselves. It's actually trusting in Jesus.

So we've seen the massive scale of the problem. And so it follows then that God has to do more than just offer me something. That would be like the medics putting the defibrillator down to Christian Erickson and saying, here you go, it's there, reach out, use it.

He can't. He can't respond to that offer. He can't save himself and make himself alive. And so God has to do something in me, similarly, to make me want to accept his offer of forgiveness and new life in Jesus.

And that is what the Christian faith is all about. Because whilst we are, we are not free to save ourselves, secondly, and wonderfully, God alone is the one who saves.

God alone is the one who saves. This really flows out from the first point, doesn't it? Because just as Christian Erickson needed others to make the decision to save him physically, so do we spiritually.

[ 11 : 23 ] And amazing, it's God who does that. So if you look down at verse 4, Ephesians 2, but God's, 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 Christ.

By grace, you have been saved. How many people are involved in that verse, in turning things around inside us? Inside us, only one, but God.

He's the only one doing something here, isn't he? All we're doing is being dead and suddenly finding ourselves alive again. That's the reality of what God has done to all those who put their trust in Jesus.

And why has God done this? Because of his great love for us. There's no other reason at all. There's nothing that God saw in these young people as delightful as they are, or any of us that meant we deserve to be saved.

But all because God is a God of mercy and love. Well, how does God save? Well, he saves through the gospel heard, the word of truth.

[ 12 : 44 ] I look at Ephesians 1, verse 13. Scan back to that verse. In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of salvation, believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit.

People were told the good news of Jesus and they believed it. That was God's means of saving them. Now, other than football, it is a summer of sport, isn't it?

T20 World Cup, so more opportunities for us to be disappointed this summer. I wrote this before last night. So, Joss Butler, he scores lots of runs, doesn't he?

Or in theory, he should, as do all the England batsmen. How? Well, he uses a cricket bat. That's the means by which he scores lots of runs, or hopefully will in the future.

Well, in a similar way, God saves people through means. His means being the sending of his son, Jesus, to die for us. And for him to willingly take on our sin and wrongdoing and our guilt before God and the punishment in our place and giving us his perfect record of always living God's way.

[ 14 : 01 ] And then rising from the dead, never to die again and seated in the heavenly realms. And that is the message that goes out far and wide. And so this group of people Paul is writing to, they heard that word of truth and they responded by believing in Jesus.

They made a real choice to believe. And yet, we see the Bible is clear, they are saved through a gift, a gift of faith.

If you look down at verse 8, 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 works so that no one may boast.

Two of the young people who are up here this morning have recently had birthdays and I'm sure they got presents. They didn't earn them. They were given to them freely and knowing them as I do, they probably didn't offer to pay their parents back for them.

None of them deserved them. Well, likewise, being brought to spiritual life is not something we've earned, it's a gift of God so that no one can boast.

[ 15 : 15 ] That's what the Bible calls grace, giving us something that we don't deserve. That's not the way the world works, is it? We're in exam season, aren't we? And we're geared up to take the credit for our performance, appraisal systems at work.

But when it comes to us spiritually, that's not the case. None of us deserve forgiveness or a new life. It's not that we are, it's smart enough to work it out for ourselves.

It's God's gift out of his great love for us, not by works, so that no one may boast. Well, when does God save us?

When does God save? When does this actually happen? Well, the Bible's quite clear that all Christians are chosen before the beginning of time. Chosen before the beginning of time.

So if you look at Ephesians chapter 1, verses 4 and 5, it says this, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and blameless before him.

[ 16 : 23 ] In love, he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ according to the purpose of his will. I don't know if you're one who's traced your family tree or how far back you've traced it.

Well, if you're a Christian here this morning, God has traced your membership to his family to before the beginning of time. God chose his people before he made the world. God decided to make the world and he decided that when he would make the world, he would make Charlie, Jess, Lucy, Rory and Sam and that he wanted them to be part of his people and so he predestined it that they would hear the good news about Jesus from others, from their parents, from their friends, from their uncles, at camp, from their youth leaders and that they would respond to it, putting their trust in Jesus and join with all those across history and across the globe who have put their trust in Jesus for themselves.

And so as we saw last week, the Bible says that the choices we make are real. We're not puppets or robots. We have, we can decide to come to Jesus or not come to Jesus and yet my heart is not a little part of the universe that is beyond God's control.

He is chosen before time who are his people. He enables all those he has chosen to hear the good news about Jesus, to consider it, to look into the evidence, to think, to ask questions and then respond to the good news of Jesus with faith.

And when they do that, when somebody does that, they are made alive with Christ. Verse 5 of Ephesians 2. even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ.

[ 18 : 22 ] By grace you have been saved and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. Think back to Christian Erickson.

He's lying motionless. The players are crowding around him just to protect him from view.

apparently he was technically dead for three or four minutes, I read.

But through CPR, through the shocks of the defibrillator, Christian Erickson hearts started beating again. He was brought back from certain death and he started talking to the medics.

They said he was 30 and he said, no, I'm not, I'm 29, which is very important, I guess, when you are 29, that you're not 30. He's brought back from death and he will probably line up against England in 11 days time.

Well, each and every time someone turns to Jesus for the first time, it's a death to life experience.

There's no exceptions. From the gang leader with terrorist parents to a nice teenager with Christian parents.

[ 19 : 31 ] Everyone who's in God's family has received that kiss of spiritual life, as it were. And the baptisms we'll do later are a picture of that. So it's not that baptism itself makes someone a Christian.

It's not holy water. It's water from a tap. It's cold water from a tap. I'm sorry about that. Baptism doesn't make someone alive, but it is a picture of what happens in someone when they put their trust in Jesus.

They go down into the water, dead, symbolizing death. Then they come out again, symbolizing new life in Jesus. So in summary then, when it comes to God's sovereignty and salvation, we're not free to save ourselves.

God alone is the one who saves. But all this can leave us asking the question, well, how do I know if I'm chosen? How do I know if I'm chosen?

If you're not a Christian here today and you're here to look into the Christian faith or support one of these five people, it's great you're here. It's a question you may ask.

[ 20 : 41 ] God has chosen his people before time. How do I know whether God has chosen me?

Well, listen to the words of Jesus on the handout. Matthew 11, 28.

Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. How do you know if you're chosen? You're chosen if you come to Jesus.

Notice Jesus' call is to all people. Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, I will give you rest. Jesus Christ offers himself freely to everyone as their saviour and promises that anyone who puts their trust in him will be saved, raised up out of the shadow of death to new eternal life with him.

Perhaps some today are feeling this call, heavy laden with sin, aware of our guilt before God. Well, wonderfully, because of God's mercy and love, the rest Jesus offers of knowing our sin is forgiven and the rest of eternal security of heaven is on offer to anyone if they come to Jesus.

How do I know if I'm chosen? Come to Jesus. Well, if you're a Christian here this morning, we can still ask that question. How do I know if I'll stay chosen? I feel weak as a Christian.

[ 22 : 11 ] I sin. How do I know I'll make it to the end? Am I really chosen? Again, hear the words of Jesus on the handout. John chapter 10 verse 29.

My father who has given them to me is greater than all and no one is able to snatch them out of the father's hand. The New Testament gives us great assurance that those who have put their trust in Jesus are safe forever.

That doesn't mean that real Christians don't have doubts or sin, but they persevere in trusting him because Jesus will keep them. I don't know if you're a big fan of Mastermind.

It used to be the saying of Magnus Magnus and I've started so I'll finish. And that is the same with God. And what he starts in bringing his people to new life in Jesus, he will finish in bringing them safely to heaven.

No one can snatch them out of God's hands. And so it's my prayer and probably the prayer of lots of others that these five youngsters if they doubt as they go on in the Christian life, they can look back to this day and what their baptism or reaffirmation points to.

[ 23 : 33 ] New life in Jesus. God chose me. He brought me to trust in Jesus. He will bring me home. Well, three brief implications as we close.

Firstly, humility. If you're a Christian here today, a follower of Jesus, well, we are to see again it is not down to you. We didn't save ourselves.

We didn't raise ourselves from spiritual death to life. Sure, we believe the gospel, but even our faith to believe was given to us from God. It means Christians can't boast over those who don't believe.

We can't be proud or arrogant. The Christian can't say to someone, well, I decided to follow Jesus because I made a better decision than you did, thankfully.

I'm more morally upstanding. I've done the right thing and you haven't. And so I'm going to be in heaven because of what I've done. Well done me. The Christian can't say that.

[ 24 : 36 ] The Christian story is essentially God has been merciful to me. I am a recipient of his grace. I have no idea why he's decided to love me and to show me mercy, but he has and he does.

He chose me, he saved me, he keeps me going and that is deeply humbling. Well, second way this affects us is giving us assurance. Because as we've already seen, salvation is not based on our performance.

Now we're back to the appraisal systems and exams, isn't it? That's the way the world works. Earn your grades by working hard. But here it's not based on our performance.

How do I know if I'm going to stay a Christian? How do I know if I'll get to the end? Well, in some ways, you can never be sure if it's ultimately down to you. And so often our assurance rests on whether we've had a good day or a bad day, a good week or a bad week.

And frankly, you know, there's a pattern of sin. We haven't read our Bible. I'm grumpy at home or grumpy at work. I feel like a rubbish Christian.

[ 25 : 49 ] And so our assurance goes up and down like a rollercoaster. But we've seen from Ephesians that whether we're saved is down to God's decision.

It's not based on my performance. Yes, Christians, we are to persevere and to keep trusting in Jesus. But we do so confidently that our destiny is completely in God's hands.

He is sovereign. He is in charge and promises to get his people to heaven. And lastly, praise. I ask at the start, you're at Oscars night, you're standing there with your Oscar, who gets the credit for your life?

Who gets the praise? When it comes down to it, only one person should get the credit for our lives, our gracious God in heaven.

He has done everything. All glory, praise and honour goes to him alone. Let's pray together.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for the Lord Jesus, that he died and rose again to take our sin upon himself so we can have new life.

[ 27 : 02 ] We thank you for acting, even when we were living apart from you to save because of your great love for us.

Amen.