

Walking in love and truth

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[0 : 0 0] The first reading today is Psalm 57 on page 572. Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me, for in you my soul takes refuge.

In the shadow of your wings I will take refuge, till the storms of destruction pass by. I cry out to God Most High, to God who fulfills his purpose for me.

He will send from heaven and save me. He will put to shame him who tramples on me. God will send out his steadfast love and his faithfulness.

My soul is in the midst of lions. I lie down amid fiery beasts, the children of man whose teeth are spears and arrows, whose tongues are sharp swords.

Be exalted, O God, above the heavens. Let your glory be over all the earth. They set a net for my steps. My soul was bowed down.

[1 : 0 3] They dug a pit in my way, but they have fallen into it themselves. My heart is steadfast. O God, my heart is steadfast. I will sing and make melody.

Awake, my glory. Awake, O harp and lyre. I will awake the dawn. I will give thanks to you, O Lord, among the peoples. I will sing praises to you among the nations.

For your steadfast love is great to the heavens, your faithfulness to the clouds. Be exalted, O God, above the heavens. Let your glory be over all the earth.

Our second reading this morning is from the book of Ephesians, and that can be found on page 1175 in the Church Bible.

Ephesians chapter 2, and we'll read the first 10 verses. Ephesians chapter 3, and we'll read the first 10 verses.

[2 : 2 8] Ephesians chapter 3, and we'll read the first 10 verses.

Ephesians chapter 3, and we'll read the first 10 verses.

That we should walk in them. Adrian, thanks very much for reading for us. Please do keep Ephesians chapter 2 open, page 1175. If you've closed the Bible, why don't I pray before we look at God's word together.

Having the eyes of your heart enlightened. Heavenly Father, we thank you that you're a God who speaks.

We thank you for your word, the Bible. Thank you for this enormous, seemingly very simple thing, but a great privilege to be able to read your word, to hear it explained.

[4 : 0 6] And we pray, please, that you would open the eyes of our hearts, so that we might see things with the eyes of our hearts that we cannot see with the eyes in our heads.

And we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, there's no denying that London is a global powerhouse.

In fact, the second most powerful city on the planet after New York. Everywhere you go, London projects power, doesn't it?

Whether it's the financial power of the city, or then as you head a bit further west, the intellectual power of its great universities, Kings, UCL, LSE.

There's the political power of Westminster. And there is the cultural and media power of the BBC, News International, Sky Sports, and so on.

[5 : 03] With their grip on the way in which we think about the world in which we live. And of course, the power that London enjoys, whether it's financial, or political, or intellectual, or cultural, very much sets the agenda for the rest of the nation.

And therefore, of course, you might be excused for thinking, who would ever do what Jamie and Timothy have done, which is to put your trust in Jesus Christ and follow him in London.

Where to be a Christian feels so weak, where it looks so much as if you're kind of on the margins of the city, of our cultural life as a nation.

Just as it would have done in first century Ephesus. Dominated as it was by the power of the Roman Empire, the second most important city in the empire.

And dominated as it was by the mighty temple of Artemis. And the massive temptation, surely, for them, as for us, is simply to get with the program of the world around us, rather than to get with God's program.

[6 : 18] That's why the Apostle Paul writes this letter. So that each one of us will live lives which are shaped by spiritual realities that we cannot see, rather than lives which are shaped by the physical realities that we can see.

Let me remind us that in this letter, God wants us to be confident that his plan for all of history to unite everything in a new creation under Jesus Christ is on track.

We began to see that last time. Just have a look at chapter 1, verse 21. Jesus Christ is all-powerful. He's now far above all rule and authority and power and dominion.

And now in chapter 2, verses 1 to 10, we see the amazing power that God has worked in everyone who has put their trust in Jesus. And it is simultaneously both one of the most shocking passages in the Bible and also one of the most wonderful passages in the Bible.

Before we start, let me remind us that the Apostle Paul wrote this to a church, to Christians. I guess there may perhaps be some of us who are slightly tempted to switch off.

[7 : 41] After all, this will be a familiar passage to some. But know this is written to you. Because, of course, each one of us here this morning needs to grasp more fully the power that is at work in us if we are to live for him and not to lose heart in the Christian life.

Well, if you're here this morning and you're looking in on the Christian life, you're looking in on the Christian faith, why this gets us to the very heart of the Christian message.

You'll find there's an outline on the back of the service sheet just to show where we are heading. Michael, would you mind switching off the heater? It's just the switch over there.

That's great. Thank you. Well done. Excellent. So, first of all, from death. Chapter 2, verses 1 to 3. Let me read them again.

The headline is verse 1.

[8 : 58] Trespasses refers principally in the Bible to the things we've done wrong before God.

It's breaking God's law, doing so in a whole variety of ways. While sins refers more to the things that we have failed to do. Failing to love God with heart and soul and mind and strength.

Failing to love our neighbours as ourselves. And the consequence, says the Apostle Paul, is that you were dead. And notice, at the same time, it was a living kind of death.

See how he goes on in verse 2 as he says, in which you once walked. You were dead, but you lived. Now, of course, lots of people who make no Christian profession whatsoever.

Or people who openly repudiate Jesus Christ appear very much alive as we do here this morning. You'll be glad to hear that everyone looks very much alive as we sit here this morning.

[10:07] So, are we really to say that such people who make no Christian profession whatsoever or who openly repudiate Jesus Christ are dead?

Well, yes. Spiritually speaking, it is what all of us are by nature like. As unresponsive to God as a corpse.

The evidence, notice, is in our lives. Because all of us are by nature followers. We're not free, as we like to think we are.

We are all by nature followers. Notice, first of all, we follow the course of this world. Verse 2. A world organized without reference to God.

It's how we all live. Just like everyone else. We follow the pattern of thought and life in the world around us. What it values. What it thinks is important.

[11:09] Rather than God. Second, we all naturally follow the prince of the power of the air. That is a reference to the devil. At which point, you and I are not to think of Halloween or a sort of disaffected teenager dabbling in the occult or anything like that.

But rather the big Bible picture. Jesus tells us the devil is the father of lies. And it's how he's introduced at the beginning of the Bible.

Some of us, many of us, will have been looking at that in our growth groups in Genesis chapter 3 recently. As he says to Eve, did God really say? As he says, you surely won't die.

You know better than God. Life without God is better than life with God. It won't matter anyway. There's no judgment. The father of lies.

And notice, verse 2, he is still at work. Exercising effective and compelling power over people's lives. Third, notice verse 3.

[12:14] We follow the passions of our flesh. Carrying out the desires of the body and mind. So we can't just blame the devil. We're not passive victims. We are responsible.

This is the way all of us, by nature, desire to live. Notice not just the sins of the body, which perhaps are the most obvious, but the sins of the mind.

Things like pride, false ambition, judgmentalism, envy, lack of self-control, and so on. It doesn't, of course, mean that you and I are not capable of doing good things.

Nor does it mean that we're as bad as we could be. But it does mean that every aspect of our being, every aspect of our personality is affected.

Perhaps there's someone here this morning, and you think to yourself, I value my freedom too much to serve Jesus, to do what Jamie and Timothy have done, and to follow him.

[13:16] But the reality is that none of us are free. The freedom that we so long for and so prize, the freedom to live without God, actually is nothing of the sort.

I gather the most popular piece of music that's now played at funerals in this country is Frank Sinatra's I Did It My Way. Something to boast about.

A badge of honour. Look at me. I did it my way. But actually, it should be a source of very deep shame.

As no doubt it is for those who request that that song is sung at their funeral, or played at their funeral. What is the result?

Verse 3. We were by nature children of wrath. It is an awe-inspiring statement, that, isn't it? Alienated from God. Facing the just judgment of God.

- [14 : 21] In other words, men and women the world over, you see, do not live in a kind of blissful state of well-meaning ignorance, where the things of God are concerned.
- Their religions and spiritualities, if they have any, do not deliver them from the judgments to come. That is how each of us, every one of us, is by nature.
- Notice how inclusive it is. I take it none of us can read Ephesians 2 verses 1 to 3 and say, well, that may well describe that other person over there, but it doesn't describe me.
- Notice too, will you, that God's wrath is not incompatible with God's love. To say, as some do, well, I believe in a God of love, not a God of judgment.
- That is a false dichotomy. It's why, you see, in verse 4, the Apostle Paul will go on to talk about God's love and mercy, and he'll do so without any sense that there's some kind of inconsistency.
- [15 : 30] Because he sees that those two things are held together, a God of love, yet a God who cares about his world, a God who will judge on the final day, those two things are held perfectly together in God's character.
- Ephesians 2 verses 1 to 3 may not be what people want to hear, but you and I need to be clear on our plight and the depth of our helplessness without Christ if we are to grasp how very, very great his power is.
- Just think back for a moment to July, when the whole, the eyes, it seems, the whole world was fixed on northern Thailand and the plight of those 12 boys trapped in a cave.
- They were two and a half miles from the entrance, if I remember, deep in a monsoon-flooded cave complex. Aged between 11 and 17, they were found sitting in darkness on a muddy ledge in a small chamber.
- And amazingly, and it was amazing, wasn't it, as the whole world watched, they were rescued with just a few hours to spare before the monsoon rains returned.
- [16 : 42] And the world rejoiced simply because we had seen the enormous danger that those boys had been in, each one.
- Just as we'll only rejoice in Jesus once we have grasped, once we are certain of the depth of our hopelessness without him.
- So, from death, secondly, to life. Verses 4-7 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.
- Verse 4, But God. It is the greatest but in the Bible. Here's the Christian message in a nutshell, because dead people cannot save themselves.
- [17 : 58] Salvation is God's initiative alone. What does that look like? Well, of course, at one level, putting our trust in Jesus Christ, it looks very mundane. Perhaps we hear a talk explaining the Christian message, we pray a prayer, we put our trust in him.
- And yet, at that point, there is the most dramatic, unseen transformation. At that point, verse 5, we've been made alive.
- Verse 6, raised up, seated in the heavenly places. Will you notice these are the very things that have happened to the Lord Jesus.
- Go back to chapter 1, verse 20. Jesus Christ, who was dead, but is now raised from the dead, and is seated at God's right hand in the heavenly places.

Now, the Apostle Paul has already explained how that is possible for the Christian in chapter 1, verse 7. In him, that's in Jesus, we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace.

[19 : 11] It is through the death of Jesus on the cross, his blood shed as a costly sacrifice, turning aside the wrath of God that is rightly ours.

It's why, you see, back in chapter 2, verse 7, it's why salvation can only be in Christ Jesus. Just as a small child may say to a parent, you know, I want to fly.

I want to fly above the clouds. And the parent explains, well, you can only do that in an airplane. You can't fly on your own. You have to be in something that can.

Just as outside we are spiritually dead, it is only when we are in Christ that we are made alive, raised to a new life. Indeed, if we are in Christ, seated already with him in the heavenly realms.

A place of absolute security where no earthly power and no spiritual power can touch us. I wonder if, like me, you are in danger of making salvation a smaller thing than it is.

[20 : 33] We rightly talk about forgiveness. We rightly talk about following Jesus. They are both wonderfully true. Those who trust in Jesus follow him. Those who trust in Jesus are forgiven. And yet, that kind of shorthand, it has its dangers, doesn't it?

Because we can fail to grasp what we have been rescued from. From death, from slavery, from the wrath of God. And we can fail to grasp what we are now.

Raised to new life in Christ. Seated with him now. Spiritually speaking. In the heavenly places. Do you realize what's happened to you if you're here this morning and you put your trust in Jesus?

It's a reality we cannot see with the eyes in our heads. But God wants us to see it with the eyes in our hearts. It's beautifully illustrated by C.S. Lewis in his book, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*.

If you've read it or seen the film, you may remember it, how the White Witch presides over a kind of lifeless museum. And in it, she has locked up people and animals and creatures, all of whom she has turned to stone.

[21 : 44] A sort of cold and clammy, lifeless, death-like state seems to reign within her, not only her land, but also specifically within the castle walls.

And there all those statues remain until Aslan the lion comes to set them free. And he does so by breathing on each statue in turn.

And as he comes along with his warm breath to a lion or a centaur or whatever kind of creature it is, tiny streaks of gold begin to run along their backs and faces and legs.

And stone hair comes to life. And warmth and color begins to suffuse these stone bodies. And we read, the whole courtyard of the castle was full of creatures jumping up to lick the lion's face because he alone had the life-giving power that was needed to set them free.

And did you notice why God has done it? Verse 4, because he is rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, because, verse 5, of his grace, the Bible's word for God's unique love, his freely given love, his never deserved loved love, his always rich love, his never restrained love.

[23 : 15] And the result, verse 7, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace and kindness towards us in Christ Jesus.

Perhaps you have a little showcase or a cabinet or just a shelf, perhaps, at home where you keep a few special things, perhaps that medal you won for playing tiddlywinks or cross-country or whatever it was when you were 12.

and you delight in it or perhaps something that you made and you delight in it and it's on your special shelf or in your special cabinet.

And you see, verse 7, God has a showcase and in his showcase are all those who belong to Jesus Christ. They'll serve for all eternity as a demonstration of his great kindness and love and grace.

Perhaps there's someone here this morning and in your heart of hearts you imagine yourself to be too bad for God. Would God ever have me? Would God ever forgive me?

[24 : 32] Well, no one belongs to God as part of his family because of their own merit. His grace, his kindness is always free. It is always undeserved.

It is always generous. Will you ask him for forgiveness and turn to him? Or perhaps you're someone and you think actually that God is rather unloving, that God is a harsh God.

In which case will you reread Ephesians chapter 2 verses 1 to 10? Will you stop and think and look at the God you are pushing away?

Or perhaps you're someone who grew up as I did with the assumption that Christianity is irrelevant. But nothing could be more relevant, could it? Nothing could be more urgent.

Or perhaps you're a Christian and life has been disappointing, it hasn't worked out how you'd have liked it to work out. And you're in danger perhaps of losing heart. The world looks big, the world looks impressive, powerful, attractive.

[25 : 45] The temptation just to live like everyone else rather than standing firm for Jesus Christ. Have you forgotten the amazing power of Christ at work in you?

So, from death to life, finally, verses 8 to 10, to live a new life.

Look at those verses with me, verse 8. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this 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.

Did you notice the lovely contrast between the walk of verses 1 and 2, and you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, and the walk of verse 10, end of verse 10, that we should walk in them.

[26 : 52] In other words, if we have put our trust in Jesus Christ, we have been saved for a whole new way of life. But before we get there, just notice that Paul underlines that we are not saved by what we do.

Verse 8, this is not your own doing, not the result of works, because of course you and I have the most enormous capacity to deceive ourselves, that actually Ephesians 2 verses 1 to 3 doesn't really apply to us, and that actually in some way we can be good enough for God.

So notice verse 8, we don't contribute anything to our salvation, not even our faith, as if our faith contributes something. Faith simply means taking God at his word, trusting him, relying upon him.

Contrast that for example with Roman Catholic teaching, that a person is justified by God's grace plus some merits of our own, as we grow in the state of grace through our good works.

Can we see that is not New Testament Christianity? Verse 9, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. Just imagine for a moment what the heavenly welcome party would look like if we were saved in part by our good works, with people kind of introducing themselves to each other, as people do at drinks parties and things.

[28 : 37] And, you know, someone says, well, I'm here because I was a pillar of the community. Someone else says, I'm here because I was a regular churchgoer. Someone else says, well, I'm here and, you know, I don't really know what everyone else would have done without me.

I'm not just a decent person. Someone else kind of looks around at everyone else and thinks, golly, what on earth are they doing here? I thought heaven wasn't, you know, I thought those kinds of people weren't allowed in here.

That wouldn't be heaven, would it? That would be hell. Everyone boasting of their achievements. But notice that doesn't mean that our works are unimportant because they are precisely what we're saved for.

Not saved by, saved for. Verse 10, for we are God's workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

We are saved to live a new life. Jamie, Timothy, you have been saved to live a new life. Can we see again, God wants us to have a big view of salvation, not a kind of ticket-in-your-pocket view of salvation, whereby we say, well, I'm glad to know I'm forgiven, I'm glad to know I'm going to get to heaven, and I'll just have put the ticket in my pocket until the day in the future when I need it.

[30 : 09] And in the meantime, I'm just going to carry on living the kind of life I was living anyway. Now, that is a complete misunderstanding of Christianity, because it fails to grasp that we are saved for something, to live a new life, the good works which God prepared for us beforehand.

Now, I take it that doesn't mean we have to go on a kind of treasure hunt, looking for all these hidden good works that we need to discover around the place and digging them up.

Now, rather, this phrase of good works is simply a description of a whole new life, the whole new life we are now to live as God's new creations.

And it's why in the second half of Ephesians, if we've begun to look ahead, there's such an emphasis on our walk, our daily walk, living out the new life we've been given to live.

And it is, of course, why the Christian life is a battle. Because those who are in Christ both live in this world, and at the same time, spiritually speaking, we are raised up and in the heavenly places already.

[31 : 26] And Ephesians 2, 1-10 is here, so that we will look at life, not through the physical eyes that we have in our head, but by using the spiritual, by looking at the spiritual realities that we can only see with the eyes in our heart.

To see the great power that is indeed at work in those who believe in Jesus, from death to life, to live out this new life that we have been given, the power of the risen Jesus at work in us and for us.

Let's pray together. have a few moments for reflection and then I shall lead us in prayer. But God being rich in mercy, heavenly father we praise you very much for this glorious reminder of what is true of everyone who has put their trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, brought from spiritual death, facing the judgment to come, spiritual life, raised to new life, raised with Jesus, seated spiritually in the heavenly places.

We praise you heavenly father for your great love, for your undeserved love. We praise you for the death of the Lord Jesus on the cross. Thank you for the wonderful privilege of having been given a new life to live.

and we pray that you would keep our eyes focused, the eyes of our heart focused on these glorious spiritual realities that we cannot see with the eyes in our heads.

[33 : 12] And we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.