

Saved by Grace

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[0 : 00] Thank you. Well, good morning, everybody. Thanks so much for joining us. Let me add my welcome to Michelle's. My name is Vijay. I'm one of the pastors here. It's great that you could log on and join us today. And I wonder what you said when Michelle asked, if you could have one superpower, what would it be? Actually, in our house, we've thought about that question a lot, and I've thought about that myself.

And flying, that usually is the one I'd go for, flying. I'm thinking as well about mental telepathy, being able to move things with my mind so I can just sit there and that sort of stuff.

But if you ask the Apostle Paul, what's the one superpower to go for? He would say, choose x-ray vision. You know, x-ray vision where you can see through physical things to what's going on underneath.

X-ray vision is the one Paul would go for. And his letter to the Ephesians is Paul using his x-ray vision because in almost every passage, he sees behind the physical stuff to the spiritual reality underneath.

Last week, he prayed that God would give the Ephesians x-ray vision. You can see there on your screen, he says, I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know basically how amazing it is to be a Christian, all the blessings you have.

[1 : 22] You see, the Ephesians have got blurry vision. They haven't got good eyesight. When it comes to their Christian life, they only use the eyes of their head.

With the physical eyes, their Christianity looks weak and unimpressive. They've begun to feel insecure about their faith. And I think that's why Paul starts the letter with such a bang. Don't you know you have every spiritual blessing in Christ?

You can't see it with the eyes of your head. These blessings are in the heavenly realms. The eyes of your heart need to be enlightened. You see, that's what this letter is.

It's x-ray vision behind the very curtain of heaven. And the more they see, the more they'll know how amazing it is to be a Christian.

And the more secure they'll feel in their faith. And being in Christ, that is the right place to be. Because God's plan is to make Jesus the centre of everything.

[2 : 31] All of existence is slowly moving towards a unity in Christ. That is chapter 1, verse 10. God's grand plan. And I wonder how powerful you have to be to pull something like that off.

You see, if Paul's superpower is x-ray vision, then God's superpower is mighty strength. God is the strong man in the universe. On your screens there, it says, His incomparably great power for us, that power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms.

See, Jesus' resurrection, that is many things. But in Ephesians, it is a demonstration of God's superpower, his mighty strength.

If he can take Jesus from death, raise him to life and seat him in the heavenly realms, maybe he really does have the power to unite the universe under his son.

And so, does knowing that God has that kind of power make you less worried about how weak the church looks in Australia?

[3 : 51] Do you feel less embarrassed about your faith, knowing that Jesus is ruling over everything? You see, if after all that, we still think Christianity looks weak and unimpressive, Paul says you need to turn the x-ray vision in on yourselves.

Our passage today is Ephesians 2, verse 1-10. It's very famous and it's the testimony of how everyone became a Christian. But more than that, it's a demonstration of God's superpower, his incomparably great power for us who believe.

And so, keep Ephesians chapter 2 open. We put a handout there on the website, which will tell you where I'm going. Let me read from verse 1. As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit, who's now at work in those who are disobedient.

All of us lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.

These are not very politically correct verses, are they? Paul doesn't pull any punches. But this is the natural state of a humanity without Jesus.

[5 : 18] When it comes to God, we were, verse 1, dead. If we stare in the mirror with physical eyes, we seem very much alive, don't we?

But it's a spiritual death. Paul says, dead in transgression and sin. You see, the most important question a person has to solve is how to get right with their creator.

And without Jesus, it's not that we were a little bit out of step with God or earnestly seeking him in our lives. We were dead. And dead things don't seek.

They don't look. They don't feel. They don't do anything, do they? They are dead. On the screen is a fish that I caught last month. There it is, very proud, finally caught a fish.

I once caught a fish this big. Well, it's true. But now that fish is dead, isn't it? It's dead and it's in my freezer. And here it is here. Obviously, not the whole fish, but just a piece of it, slowly thawing out here at church.

[6 : 24] What chance does that piece of fish have of bringing itself back to life, of finding the endless ocean and swimming away happily ever after?

About as much chance as we have of deciding to follow Jesus on our own. Actually, I think it's worse than that. Because verse 2 and 3 says, we used to follow the ways of the world.

That is, a world in rebellion to its creator. We used to follow the ruler of the kingdom of the air. That is, the devil. And we used to follow the cravings of our flesh.

The driving forces of our lives seem to be an unholy trinity. The world, the flesh, and the devil. Totally disobedient when it comes to God.

And I wonder if Paul's diagnosis makes more sense of the world you see around you. A world in disobedience to its creator.

[7 : 26] Perhaps you disagree with Paul's diagnosis. Because with physical eyes, when you look in the mirror, all you see is kind and respectable, moral, middle class citizens.

But x-ray vision shows how heaven sees us. A world in rebellion to its creator. And instead of being right with him, verse 3, deserving of his wrath.

That is very strong, isn't it? If you are not a Christian, we're so glad you've joined us today. But unless you are in Christ, this is still how heaven sees you today.

And on that last day, there's nothing for you except the wrath that you deserve. You see, getting right with our creator is everything, isn't it?

Your only hope is salvation in Christ. And speaking of salvation, I've heard a lot of Christian testimonies over the years.

[8 : 25] I've given my own many times. And they all go like this. I was a bit of a selfish person. And then I heard about Jesus. I thought about him in my head.

And I decided to follow him in my life. And Paul says, no. That's not correct. Paul says, we were dead. We were following the world, the flesh, and the devil.

As far as deciding to follow God and Jesus, we were like a piece of frozen fish, deciding to swim back to the ocean on its own. You see, verse 1 to 3 is the testimony of every Christian minus the Christ.

Before Jesus, verse 1 to 3. After Jesus, verse 4 to 6. The after picture, verse 4 to 6. That is our second point.

Look at verse 4. It begins with the words, but God. That way you know God is the one who's intervened. Verse 4. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions.

[9 : 38] Before, verse 1, we were dead in sin. After, verse 5, made alive with Christ. And not just made alive, is it? Look at these three verbs.

Made alive with Christ. Verse 6. Raised us up with Christ. Verse 6. Seated us with him in the heavenly realms. It's fully a work of God.

He does everything. You see, the Christian testimony should only be nine words. Here it is. Nine words. God brought me from death to life in Jesus.

Nine words. Only God has the death to life superpower. And normally I would illustrate this by, you know, something about a doctor resuscitating someone in the emergency room or Superman and his super strength.

But the only picture that properly illustrates verse 4 to 6, what God has done for us, was last week on your screens there. God's power for us who believe, it's the same power as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him, had his right hand in the heavenly realms.

[10:56] You see, it's the same verbs and the same language. It's not as though God resurrected Jesus on Easter Sunday and then put his superpowers away. No. He exerts that same power in us every time he makes a new Christian again and again and again.

We were dead. God made us alive. We were in the pit. God raised us to the palace. We were facing wrath. Now in the family.

You see, you will love the one who saves you. You will give yourself to the powerful things you see. And if you only use the eyes of your head, all you'll see are the power structures of this world.

They'll fool you into thinking that they're more powerful than God and draw you away from him. Or they'll scare you into being insecure about being a Christian.

You see, but being a Christian means we're in Christ. And that means God has joined us onto Jesus by the Spirit. It means whatever Jesus has, we have too.

[12:08] And so every blessing in the heavenly realms, an eternal inheritance. It's all ours because it's all his. It means where Jesus goes, we go too.

So he gets raised from the dead. Well, by the Spirit, we get raised too. He is seated on the throne. Then we are sitting next to him right now. That is no accident either.

Where he goes, we go too. And even though you can't see this with the eyes of your head, this is the spiritual reality of every Christian person.

The idea is we see ourselves sitting next to Jesus on the throne and we know that every power structure in the world is under both our feet.

That way we'll feel secure about being a Christian. You see, you will love the one who saves you.

You will give yourself to the powerful things around you.

[13:10] And verse 7 tells us why God has done all of this for us. This is our third point. Verse 7 says that in the coming ages, God will get all the glory.

In other words, look at verse 7. See, there's no richer gift, no richer grace than giving someone a place in heaven. Verse 7, there's nothing kinder than giving someone new life in Christ.

Christians, we are little demonstrations of God's power. He parades us around the heavenly realms to show how great and glorious he is. We're like little statues of his grace in his trophy cabinet.

And I wonder how that makes you feel to know that God did everything for you just to show off, as it were. You see, we hate show-offs, don't we? We don't like the idea of glory seekers.

In Australia, we call them tall poppies, don't we? And we cut them down. And I think it's because we don't think people fully deserve glory on their own.

[14:22] Or worse still, that they'll take the glory away from us. And so, just using Ephesians, let's decide, let's become a panel of judges, let's decide whether God deserves the glory.

So, again, his grand plan is to have his son at the centre of the universe. Chapter 1, verse 10. By his power, he's already raised and seated Christ where he needs to be.

But he's also done the same thing for us. A universe revolving around Jesus, he's where he needs to be, and we are included as well. Does that sound glorious to you?

We said one of the reasons we hate glory seekers is that they take glory away from us. So, let's sharpen the question. Does God deserve glory alone?

Well, we were dead in sin, following the world, the flesh, and the devil. Verse 1 to 3. But now look at verse 4 again. It was because of his great love for us.

[15:23] God was rich in mercy. Verse 5. It is by God's grace that you have been saved. You see, when the lifeguard rescues me from drowning at the beach, the onlookers don't pat me on the back.

Only the lifeguard gets the credit because he did all the saving. All I did was add the drowning. And in verse 8 to 10, Paul shows why God alone deserves the glory.

Verse 8. For it is by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not from yourselves. It is the gift of God. Verse 9.

Not by works, so that no one can boast. It's the same word for glory, so that no one can glory in themselves. When it comes to our salvation, all we contributed was the drowning.

Look at verse 10. For or because we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus. You see, that is the language of creation.

[16:31] The idea is that God made everything in the first creation, but Christians are a second act of creation. We are a special piece of God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus, it says.

At the first creation, the sun, the moon, and the stars, they weren't confused as to who did all the doing. Actually, it was only Adam and Eve who tried to steal a bit of that glory.

Do you remember what the devil said to them? When you eat this fruit, your eyes will be open, and you will be like God. To assume that we had some part in the second creation in our salvation is akin to being like Adam and Eve, stealing some glory from God at the creation.

It puts us right back there in the garden. You see, God must be the sole creator of new created beings, just as he was the sole creator of the first created beings.

Our Old Testament reading, which Sue read for us, was Isaiah 42, and it underlines this same point. Look on your screens. This is what the Lord said.

[17:48] The Lord was the creator of the heavens. He gave breath to its people in orange. That is the first creation. The second creation, he opens the eyes that are blind.

He releases from the dungeon and those who sit in darkness. That is the second creation when he saves Christians. The reason why, I am the Lord, that is my name. I will not yield my glory to another or my praise to idols.

See, he must be the sole creator of second created beings. We've been talking today about being secure in our faith. That's what we've been driving at.

And actually, I think it's more secure to have a glory-seeking God because that means we don't have to save ourselves. Like the lifeguard, the one who does the saving gets the credits.

You see, what if the Christian testimony was this? What if it was, God did his bit, but I also did my own bit? That means, when I'm serving well at church, people are patting me on the back, I feel proud and self-righteous and get the glory.

[18:58] But you only have to read the Gospels to know how Jesus regarded self-righteous, glory-seeking people. What if I'm doing poorly at church while other people are exercising their gifts well?

I'll feel crushed, won't I? What if I fall into sin while other people are really going well in the Christian life? I will feel crushed. As long as salvation is God plus me, then my salvation is in jeopardy.

If God gives anyone a tiny piece of the glory, then they will have to do some of that life-to-death saving work themselves. And as we've seen, only God has the death-to-life superpower.

We are much more secure if God goes for 100% of the glory, because that means He will handle 100% of the salvation because like the lifeguard, the one who does the saving deserves the glory. You see, once there was a church called the Corinthians. We all know them. They loved chasing God's glory for themselves. And Paul said this to them on the screen.

[20:11] God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things and the things that are not to nullify the things that are so that no one may boast or glory before Him.

When it comes to Corinth, God chose to save the bottom of the barrel because that would make Him look better. The lowly, the despised, the nothings of the world, He saved them all so they wouldn't be confused as to where the power came from.

And if getting glory is what God cares most about in the world, then we are totally secure because that means all our salvation is in His hands and not our own.

It means it's okay to feel weak and unimpressive because that will only make God look more powerful and gracious, which is just how He wants it.

You will love the one who saves you you will give glory to the powerful things of the world. For those who aren't Christians, just so we don't leave you in despair, in your heart what you need to do is turn the words of Ephesians 2 verse 1 to 10, you need to turn them into a prayer.

[21:30] So just admit that what Paul says in verse 1 to 3 is true about you and then ask God to do all the gracious and powerful things in this passage for you in your life and then contact me or Andrew or Mark and tell them that you have become a Christian.

For the rest of us, the application today is praise and security. Praise because God handles everything and that is more secure for our salvation.
and so let's pray as we finish. Father God, we praise you that you have done everything, that we only deserved wrath but you were the one rich in love, rich in mercy, rich in grace, that it was your power who raised us up with Christ and Father, help us to feel secure knowing that power like that was at work in us.
help us not be distracted or falsely believing the powers we see around us and Father, we want to give you all the glory.
Thank you that we are secure when you take the glory because it means you handle all the salvation and Father, help us to rest in these things secure in our faith.
[22 : 58] In Jesus' name, Amen.