

Alive with Christ!

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 18 May 2008

Preacher: Rev. Keith Ganzer

[0 : 00] Let's pray together. Our God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we come now to your word and ask that you would speak it into our minds and hearts and lives.

In Christ's name, amen. Well, we are in Ephesians, and you'll stay there in your Bibles, I trust, as we talk about Chapter 2 together.

On Tuesday nights, I'm involved in a group called Central Focus. We study the Bible together, and we have a great time doing it. You ought to be a part if you're not already. We're studying Ephesians there, moving along quite a bit faster than the sermon series, I'm happy to say, and it just keeps getting better as we do this.

And I walk home on Tuesday nights. I used to live a couple blocks that way, and I walk home. I almost fell out of the pulpit in the 9 o'clock service, so I don't want to be careful. And I walk home, and the truths of Ephesians run through my mind, and I think to myself, is this really what I believe, and is it really changing my life?

One of the people in my group said to me the other day, they said, I thought it was really good. They said, there's a lot more to being a Christian than I realized studying Ephesians.

[1 : 35] And that's so true, isn't it? How vital it is that we understand all that we have, all that we have in Jesus Christ, in order that we know how to live as the church. That's Ephesians in a nutshell.

Maybe a little too simplistic, but in a nutshell, it's who we are in Christ, so we know how to live as his followers and as the church. Well, today our attention is on the very nature of salvation.

We're going to do what Paul would tell the Ephesians they ought to do in verse 12, which wasn't read yet, but verse 12 of chapter 2. He said to them, remember that you were at one time separated from Christ.

He goes on to say, having no hope, remember. Well, this morning, we're going to remember and consider what it means for us to come alive in Christ.

Ephesians, as you know, is very concerned with what it means for us to be in Christ, what it means to be one with Jesus Christ, and the implications that that has, what it means to be part of his body, the church, what it means to have been brought into that body from eternity past, master planned into the body of Christ.

[2 : 53] And we saw in chapter 1 through about verse 14, that Paul presented the master plan of God from eternity. And then verses 15 to 28, he prays essentially that we would understand it, that we would really get a grip on what it means to be in Christ.

Paul wants us to know, verse 19 of chapter 1, he says, what is the immeasurable greatness of his power at work in us who believe?

And chapter 2, he's picking up from there. Paul wants us to understand that in being in Christ, we are possessors of the power of God.

It isn't just that when we're saved, our sins are forgiven, plus nothing else, that we have some kind of simple legal transaction and life goes on as normal, but we're forgiven.

No, Paul wants us to understand the power of God at work in us. He's going to get there in chapter 3 in his prayer. That's his final point before he launches into his exhortations of chapter 4.

[4 : 01] Paul explains that we share in the resurrection power of God, and it's this text that brings us right to the heart of it. And we're looking just at verses 1 to 7 in the sermon today.

Through verse 10, the reading was through verse 10, but David's going to pick up with verses 8, 9, and 10 next week. I want you to see that there are three aspects of salvation in this section.

Three things. Salvation is from death. Salvation is into life. And salvation is with purpose.

From death into life with purpose. That marks the text in three sections. Verses 1 to 3, death.

Verses 4 to 6, the life we have. And verse 7, the purpose for it. Why do we have this life? You're going to love where this is going, but we have to start where Paul starts, and that's at the bottom.

[5 : 04] In verses 1 to 3. Looking back from the perspective in life in Christ that Paul enjoys, he says that life before Christ was death. If you're a Christian, this section describes your past.

And if you're not a Christian, this section describes your present reality. Verse 1, Paul's basic statement about our condition before we came to Christ. And you were dead.

Through the trespasses and sins in which you once walked. Now the RSV, if you're paying attention, the RSV has a few words at the start of verse 1 that don't belong there yet.

They're not there in the Greek. Paul's not giving away any good stuff yet. He simply starts this way. He says, and you were dead. Literally in trespasses and sins.

You were among the living dead, Paul says. You were a sinner and you were dead. Our trouble as humanity is not fundamentally in any variety of things.

[6 : 12] It's not fundamentally that we are out of harmony with our environment or fundamentally that we can't make meaningful relationships or fundamentally whatever else it is that experts will say is the basic problem of men and women.

All these things are problems. But the fundamental problem is that we're dead apart from Jesus Christ. Ephesians 4.18 says, we were alienated from the life of God.

That's what it means to be dead. To be alienated from the life of God. Kept apart from the life of God. You know, at first glance, I think if we're honest, this is odd.

It seems odd because we look around and there's lots of people that we know that don't make any profession of Christian faith and they strike us as being very much alive, don't they? The athlete or the scholar or your neighbor who has a great personality and they seem to live very full lives.

But the Bible says that any who are not in Christ are dead. That at the core of who they are, the most crucial area of their soul, they're unable to respond to God.

[7 : 21] They don't have love for God. They're not aware of God's reality to their life. They don't long for fellowship with His people. They're blind to the glory of Christ and they do not love Him.

They're the walking dead. They are the walking dead. Paul says we once walked in these trespasses and sins. And what he means is that that was our way of life.

That was the way we lived. It was the atmosphere in which we lived. We were enveloped. We were controlled by trespasses and sins. We were dead in them. Not because of them.

We were dead in our trespasses and sins. They defined who we were. We did not die because we sinned. We sinned because we were already dead.

It's the very opposite, you see, of what it means to be in Christ. Paul will draw this great contrast between the two, between being in sins and trespasses and in Christ.

[8 : 21] Well, think about these words for a second with me. Trespass. To trespass means to go where you know you ought not to, to do what you know you ought not to do. So you see the sign. It says no trespassing.

And you know you're not supposed to go in there. So to trespass is to do what God has forbid us to do in his law. But sin is perhaps a broader category.

Sin takes on the nuance of missing the mark, of falling short of a standard. What's the standard for Paul? Well, it's just the glory of God. Just the glory of God.

Romans chapter 1, he says, They did not honor him as God or give thanks to him. That's what it means to glorify God, to honor him as God.

This has been very helpful to me, to understand that glory is when God reveals who he is and we glorify God when we say and praise him for who he is.

[9 : 20] It's naming the attributes of God. It's describing who God is and his magnificence. Paul says no one does that in their life apart from Christ.

No one does that. Now, it doesn't mean that all people are thereby on the same level of sinful decadence, if you will, right? Sin is less a question, in fact, of what you do than it is of what you don't do.

The failure to honor God. And we all fall vastly short of that, don't we? I mean, if we all went on this holiday weekend out to Vancouver Island and we all lined up on the shore of the Pacific there, looking out, and we had a jumping contest into the ocean.

And you get as far a running start as you want. And we're trying to jump, oh, to Hawaii or something. And so we're just going to see who can get the closest.

And so some of us start and jump quite a ways into the water. And perhaps you know those people. You think, oh, they would make it. They make it quite a ways towards paradise, towards God. [10:31] I'm not trying to equate Hawaii and heaven, but there it is. And some of them jump a ways further and then others like us would run up and probably trip on a log and just smack the water or something.

But the point is that whether or not I jumped 10 feet into the water, I fell right into the first wave. I'm not any closer. I might have gone a little further in, but on the scale, it's nothing. That's our reality. And that's important because sometimes we meet good people and they're not Christians. And they do good things.

And they do civic good and humanitarian good and they care for the poor and they love their families and they're generous. And we ought to say that's a good way to be. And we admire that way of life.

But listen, even those who are evil and sinners can do good. Jesus said, even you who are evil know how to give good gifts to your children. The issue is elsewhere.

[11:40] It is that you don't do and you don't live up to the glory of God. That's the issue. So we affirm with Paul that life without God is living death.

Now Paul goes on to say a couple things, three things actually about this state of death. We won't dwell real long on them. The first thing Paul says, verse 2, if you'd look at that, Paul says, we were following the course of the cosmos, this world.

We did what everybody else did. We walked according to this ungodly world. Literally, we lived according to the age of this world. That's the language Paul uses.

One commentator says it this way, of those who live according to the world. Their behavior has been determined by the powerful influence of society's attitudes, habits, and preferences, which were alien to God and his standards.

That's pretty good. When we were dead, we lived according to the ideological world of sin, the conceptual world of evil, the system of Satan. Have you ever had someone say to you, I don't want to be a Christian because I want to live the way I want.

[12:51] I have a family member who says, I don't want to be a Christian because I don't want God bossing me around all the time. Well, Paul says, you just end up doing what the world dictates you do anyway. He says, you're deluded if you think that you determine yourself.

We say we do what we want, but we never ask who or what is forming the wants that we have. So you were in bondage to the course of the world, Paul says. What does that look like?

Well, how about a materialism that says that what you own is who you are, that you need more money, more things, more luxury, a bigger house, a nicer car, the new iPod.

How about a humanism that says you're the boss and you're the king and you decide the way you live your life. Isn't it great that you can have things your way? Just buy a hamburger. It's wrapped all around it.

Have things your way. How about a hedonism that says you're very happy, but you're happy in relation to the level of pleasure you can attain.

[13:57] So by golly, get all you can. Live the life of sexual satisfaction, which we keep extending and extending and extending. Or how about a technologization that says that the newest and best technology ought to dictate the norms for our life.

Christian, you're no longer in bondage to these things. You have the power to live differently. You are no longer walking according to the world. Paul says the second thing that you used to do is that you walked following the prince of the power of the air and the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience.

Paul says we did what the devil wanted. We were living under the influence of Satan himself. Satan is described in the Gospels as the ruler of the demons, the prince of the world.

Paul says he's the god of the age. He's using that same language again. Here, Paul says, this prince, the ruler, the archaic, the leader, who foments the system, who breathes the influence.

He's the one who's over the power of the air. The domain, the realm in which Satan operates. It doesn't have to mean that Satan's always physically active all the time.

[15:11] It means that he's acting in terms of an ideology. He's promoting concepts. He's breathing ideas. He's behind the whole system that's right from hell. And Satan is over.

That whole spirit which now works in the living dead. And he commands the innumerable hosts that are under him in this world to create the spirit of the age. He is the ruling lord over the evil matrix that opposes God and draws people into disobedience.

That's who we were under. That's what we were following before Christ. Third thing, Paul says, verse 3, among these we all once lived, that is, among these people who followed the world and followed the devil, we lived in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of body and mind. We did what pleased our sinful nature. That's what Paul means. Flesh in Paul is sort of a technical term. It doesn't have to mean the physical body. It can mean our whole corrupt, sin-bent inclination, our nature.

It's interesting that Paul includes flesh and mind. He does not, as the RSV has, change the word from flesh to body. They're not two different words. He's not somehow now saying, well, in your body, that is in your physical body.

[16:37] He's keeping this concept of our sinful nature. Our fallen, self-centered, corrupt nature. He says, we did what our sinful desires and impulses of the mind told us to.

We were compelled to do those things. We were proud and arrogant and ungodly in our ambition and we fought malicious thoughts and so on. And yes, there were sensual sins too and this sinful nature that was inclined away from God.

So those are the three things. Paul sums it up. And how could it be otherwise? But it's harrowing. The end of verse 3.

We were by nature children of wrath, Paul says. Like the rest of mankind. The sense is that we were children destined for wrath.

It was fitting and suitable that we get that wrath because, Paul says, we were evil by our very nature. That is, there was something intrinsic to us from our origin, our descent.

[17:39] This is Romans chapter 5. By virtue of being a child of Adam in the human race, there is a nature in us that resists God, that is sinful. And so the wrath of God is on us.

John the Baptist says, whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him. It remains. It's already on us. It's our condition.

Brothers and sisters, this is who we essentially were. There was no escaping it. There's no way that men and women in themselves are able to change this. It is universal. It is absolute.

There are no exceptions. Your family and friends, your neighbors, your co-workers are not okay apart from Christ. They are not even just lacking something.

They are not even just sick. They are dead apart from Christ. And so were you if you are a Christian. It was hopeless. Paul says in Romans 3, there is no one righteous.

[18:45] Not even one. There is no one who understands. There is no one who seeks God. The radical claim of the New Testament that we are totally dead without hope, Paul says.

But. There's a but. But there is.

There is hope and it is God. Paul says, we were dead in sin, but God. We were captive to the prince of the power of the air and enslaved at the course of the world.

But God. We were children of wrath, but God. But God. The pastor who preached the sermon that first introduced the gospel to me 12 years ago in a Baptist church said that these are the greatest two words of the whole Bible.

And I think he's right. And they ought to be written large over our lives and over the church because it's only from God, of course, that there could be any hope for the dead.

[20:02] And you say, well, not for me. Keith, that's too good. I'm in bondage to so many things in life you don't even know about. I say, it doesn't matter what you think.

You have to reckon with God and the God who raised Jesus Christ from the dead has something different in mind for you. To go from death to life is resurrection and that's God's business.

That's what he does. And it can be yours through faith in his son. You can be like Paul and look back on your life and say, I was that. I was in sin and captive to the devil and captive to the world, but I'm not that anymore.

It's the power of God that can change you. It's the best news of your life. Now, Paul does two things here.

He's going to tell us what it is that God has done and then he's going to tell us why did God do it? What has God done? Verses four to six.

[21 : 09] Three spectacular things. He's made us alive together with Christ, Paul says. That's verse five. He raised us up with him. That's the second thing.

And then he seated us with him. That's the third thing. So he made us alive and he raised us up and he seated us with Christ at the right hand of the Father. Those things. Does that sound familiar to you? Heard that recently?

It should. That's what Paul says the Father did to Christ in chapter one. That God the Father made Christ alive. Raised and seated Christ. And now he does it to us. The same power that raised Christ from the dead has now worked in us and it exalted Christ has exalted us.

Now more on that in a moment but do you see I skipped a bit there because before Paul can even he can't help himself before he even gets to the point of telling us what God has done. He's got to tell us a little more about who this God is.

It's beautiful in verse four. He says, but God who is rich in mercy out of the great love with which he loved us even when you were dead through your trespasses. God rich in mercy.

[22 : 18] I love that. Plusios. You can hear it in the word. Abounding. Full of mercy. Loaded with mercy for the sinner. Not some little part of who God is.

It's all of who he is. It fills him. God's always been merciful. Exodus 34 right after the golden calf. When Israel deserved death God says to Moses I am a God merciful and gracious.

It's always been through the Psalms and the prophets and in the life of Christ and now God is the God of mercy who doesn't give us what we deserve. And Paul says God's merciful because God loves us.

The great love with which he loved us. Salvation is based on love and Paul can hardly control himself here. He's so excited in the language that he wrote in in the Greek.

Salvation has nothing to do with us. It's his love. God is love and God's love shows itself in grace and mercy. We don't get what we deserve that's mercy but then we get what we don't deserve that's grace.

[23 : 25] And that's amazing because when we sin if we believe the scriptures when we sin we've sinned against God. We've sinned against God's love. Certainly Exodus taught us that.

The great God who loved his people and they sinned against that love and we've done the same thing and yet his love came when we were failing. That's the time when his love came that in spite of who we were God loved us and you say I'm no good God shouldn't love me that's absolutely right but God does love you.

Nothing about who we are stirred God's heart to send his son. He did it because he's love. So God made us alive.

He freed us from our bondage to the world and the devil's systems and our sinful hearts and Christian if you're doubting the power of God in your life today and I don't know what you're going through I don't know what Satan is telling you even right now about who you are and how you're not good enough and how you can't live up to what God expects and how you failed and how God doesn't care about you anymore and I say to you you need to know that the very power that raised Jesus Christ has raised you.

It has already happened. You are no longer dead. Do you believe that? Christian get a grip on who you are and what you've got and what God's already done in your life.

[25 : 02] All those riches of God's grace are yours. Now does that change the way you get up in the morning? Can it not? I'll tell you it does for me when I really get my mind around this.

Around the fact that God has already raised me up freed me from the bondage I was in. He made you alive with Christ. You have spiritual life. You're responsive to God.

You're sensitive to God. You open the Bible and you believe it to be true. The Spirit of God strengthens you to live obedient lives. You have a sense of God at work.

You live your life out of God's priorities. These are all signs that God has made you alive in Christ. And He did it when He made Christ alive. In some way that I don't fully understand, we were there when Christ rose from the dead.

We were raised with Him. Christ stands as the head of the new humanity and if you're in Christ you are a new creation and you are found within Christ. You're not just made alive, you're raised up.

[26 : 06] That's the second thing. And you're seated at God's right hand. That's unbelievable that you and I and our mortal bodies struggling our way through life, falling down and getting up and trying to do well and trusting God that we in all of our struggle have already been raised and seated

with Jesus Christ.

And I can't know all that means. But I know it means at least this. There's power for living a different life. And that power is available now. It is the power to live our lives and a life as the church to the glory of God.

To do the opposite of what Romans said which is that they didn't glorify God. We have the power to glorify God. And we're joined to the Savior. And so there we're seated right next to God the Father with that Savior.

That determines who we really are. That's who you really are, Christian. And you'll remember, we have to remind ourselves though, it's hard to remember that the heavenly places, when Paul says that, it doesn't mean in heaven as opposed to on earth.

As though they're two completely separate spheres. No, no, there's constant traffic if you will between heaven and earth. The heavenly places are the points of heavenly reality that are accessible to us now, right now.

[27 : 35] They're the realm in which these spiritual realities are true for us today. Paul refers to this several times in Ephesians. Those heavenly places are where we are.

They're the real reality. This cosmos, the world that ignores God, that's the false reality. That's not the real reality. Listen, you either live in that world in sin and under its influence or you live in the heavenly realms with Christ and under His influence.

Now. Today. Because sometimes we oversimplify salvation, don't we? We say it's forgiveness of sins.

Oh, it sure is. But it's not just that. It's a change in lordship. It's a reorientation of our lives. We're turned inside out and we live no longer in sin and death.

We live in Christ and righteousness. To be saved is not to be subject to the flesh any longer. Not to be captive to the world or to the devil but to live victoriously in Christ.

[28 : 38] Our identity is changed. Paul says, I no longer live. But Christ lives in me. And as Christ lives in you and you live in Christ, He's the environment that shapes you.

He reorders your passions and desires. He sets the desires and passions of your heart. Jesus says, we're in the world but we're no longer of the world.

We're no longer controlled by the world. Look at what God has done for us. But why? I mean, why? Why do it? What's the point? Why have we been saved, church? Is it simply so that we can enjoy God forever?

Well, we do. We do get to enjoy God forever. But is that it? Verse 7. Paul says, all of this is so that in the coming ages, let me stop there.

[29 : 45] In the coming ages. Now, Paul's just said, you no longer live according to the age of this world. We're done with that age. We're in the coming ages now.

If you're in Christ, you're no longer in the age of the world. You are here in the coming ages. In the coming ages that God might show, demonstrate, display, put out there for everybody to see what? The immeasurable riches of His grace and kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. There it is. Paul's already said at chapter 1 that all of our spiritual blessings are to the praise of His glory.

God's ultimate motivation in saving us is so that we will be forever the evidence and the demonstration of the magnificence of His grace.

Do you get it? You're not the point. I mean, you're not the point. Oh, He loves you.

[30 : 49] And He's given so much grace and mercy to you. And He wants to dwell with you. Oh, you're there. You're right there in the heart of it.

But you're not the center of it. God's at the center. God saved you not just for your sake, but so that you can be His masterpiece.

So that God will hold you up and show you off to all creation as evidence not of how well you did, but as evidence of the gracious God He is.

Because our life points straight to the cross and to the resurrection of His Son so that in the end God gets the glory and God gets the praise and God gets to show off who He is.

That's the purpose. You exist ultimately for God's eternal glory. And let me suggest that you find your greatest and most valuable identity in that.

[31 : 52] And you find it in that now. That's not waiting until the day after you die. That starts now. The eternal ages are now. So that your life and salvation and the decisions you make and the family you raise and the job you have and the friendships you nurture and the way you care for the

world and the words you speak to someone who's hurting and the food you eat and the intimacy you have with your spouse and the games you can play with others and the fun you can have in this life, whatever it is, every aspect of your life, the way you react to injustice and poverty in the world, the way we live as the church, every aspect of our life is meant to now reflect who God is.

that God is showing the world how immeasurably rich in kind grace he is because you're different. You don't live in bondage to the world and the devil and yourself any longer so that God gets the glory because you show forth who he is.

You don't have to live for yourself. praise God for all that we have in Jesus Christ.

And now may we live to your glory, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit starting today and through all eternity. Amen.

Amen. Let us pray. Father, we thank you for your love.

[33 : 38] We thank you that you have created us and put us into a world of beauty. And we thank you for the many ways you show yourself to us.

For the warmth and light of the sun this long weekend. For the faithfulness with which your word was taught this morning. For your spirit which helps us hear what you are saying to us and helps with the transformation of our sinful selves.

And for your sun, the light of this world and his sacrificial love for us. Lord, in your mercy, we think about all who are traveling this weekend and the next.

Give them safety. God, drive us from rash and impatient decisions. In particular, Lord, we pray for the 104 youth of our church on Enville Island and their leaders.

we ask for their safe return and that as well that they will come back with a greater commitment to following you and bringing your light to their schools, universities, and activities.

[35 : 02] We ask that they will grow in grace and knowledge of you, that they may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ and be filled with the fruits of righteousness which come through Jesus Christ.

We pray for everyone involved in the leadership of our church. We ask for protection against the very sophisticated Satan and the myriad temptations he puts in our way.

give our leaders courage, strength, and a clear knowledge of your will and help us to follow their directions.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer. We pray for the many programs at St. John's from the Casserell Ministry to Grief Share to Christianity Explored.

We pray for those who lead such programs and for those who participate in them. We ask that coming to know you better will be the end result and we ask your blessing on them.

[36 : 15] And we think particularly of those who have been touched during the mission. May their hunger, curiosity, and desire to know more about you continue until they find you.

And may we consciously continue to share our knowledge of you with the world around us. May we continue with the sense of urgency even though Rico has left and the events of the omission are becoming a memory.

There is such a sense of disaster in the world these days. Our televisions are filled with graphic images from Miramar and China and the numbers of dead and missing have become unimaginable.

Father, we ask that you will work through these catastrophes to bring people to you. We ask that rigid regimes will open up and accept the freely profit help.

Be with those who are directly affected, with parents who have lost a child or children, with children who have lost a parent or parents, with communities who have lost so many.

[37 : 36] Console them as they try to come to grips with their new reality and give them strength and courage to rebuild their shattered lives. Lord, in your mercy.

And Lord, in our own parish, there are those in distress as well, whether from sickness or other causes. In particular, we ask for your healing touch on Deborah, Rowena, Fiona, Erwin, Janet, and Margaret, Lord, and now, in a minute of silence, let us pray for those individuals that are known to us.

Finally, Lord, we ask for your mercy on all of us as we go about the coming week. Strengthen us, we pray. Help us as we interact with our friends and neighbors and strangers so that in everything we do, your glory may be preeminent.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer. Amen.