

"You Were Dead...but God"

Ephesians 2:1-10

I. Introduction

- A. Spiritual growth can be compared to typical human development
 - 1. There are steps that every spiritual person ought to be taking toward maturity
 - 2. We need to learn how to carefully and accurately self-evaluate our spiritual maturity
- B. God has the power to intercept a person's life and radically change their future
 - 1. God protected David from Saul
 - 2. He intervened in Joseph's life
 - 3. He remembered Noah and his family during the flood
 - 4. He was merciful to forgive the nation of Israel after the Babylonian captivity
 - 5. He used Jacob despite his dysfunctional family
 - 6. Death is universal to all mankind, but God counteracts death with the promise of resurrection
 - 7. The future is uncertain to us but well known to God

II. Wandering *from* God (vv. 1-3)

- A. The first ten verses of Ephesians 2 are a panorama of our salvation
 - 1. These verses tell us about our past, our present, and our future
 - 2. They also outline the steps of normal Christian development
- B. The first phase of a Christian's spiritual development is where we all were before we met Jesus Christ
 - 1. Before Christ, we were all dead on arrival
 - 2. We are separated from God by sin
 - 3. Unbelievers aren't just sick—they're dead
 - a. They lack the capacity to respond to spiritual stimuli
 - b. They don't need a self-help course or personality adjustment—they need salvation, a "but God" moment
 - i. You can put a person in therapy and they'll come out a well-adjusted sinner; you can put a person in church and they'll come out a religious sinner
 - ii. It's only when you put a person in Christ that they are a saved sinner
- C. As soon as Adam ate the forbidden fruit, he died spiritually—he was separated from his Creator (see Genesis 2:17)
 - 1. Romans 5:12
 - 2. This is why an unbeliever cannot understand spiritual things apart from God revealing it to him
 - 3. I Corinthians 2:14
 - 4. A dead person can do nothing to improve their condition; you can't be more or less dead than somebody else
- D. If you are dead, you need a new birth—"you must be born again" (John 3:7)

1. What causes this death? It's our nature—we are by nature the children of wrath or the children that incur God's wrath
 2. "You He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins" (v. 1)
 - a. The Greek word for sin is *hamartia*, which literally means to miss the mark
 - i. This word is used 173 times in the New Testament
 - ii. To sin is to fall short; it's what you don't do—you don't make God's mark
 - b. A trespass is different
 - i. To trespass is a deliberate action—it means to cross a known boundary
 - ii. It's a willful act of disobedience
 - E. "You once walked according to the course of this world" (v. 2)
 1. The Greek word used here for *walked* is *peripateó*, which means to order your behavior
 2. One source suggests that this word could also mean to meander or to browse—wandering about loosely, without a goal or purpose
 3. This is the natural human proclivity—to wander (see Isaiah 53:6)
- III. Waking to God (vv. 4-6)
- A. The phrase "but God" is one of the most significant, eloquent transitions in Scripture
 1. It appears forty-five times throughout the Bible
 2. "If you understand those two words—'but God'—they will save your soul" —James Montgomery Boice
 3. "These two words, in and of themselves, in a sense contain the whole gospel" —Martyn Lloyd-Jones
 - B. You were sleeping the sleep of death until God woke you up
 1. He "made us alive together" (v. 5)
 2. If you're a saved person, you have a "but God" moment
 - C. Why did God do it?
 1. Why bother with interrupting the normal course of a person's life to do this?
 2. Because God is merciful
 - a. God is "rich in mercy" (v. 4)
 - b. Lamentations 3:22
 3. "Because of His great love" (v. 4)
 - a. God loves you, and when you discover His love for you, it's monumental
 - b. God isn't out to get you or hurt you; He's not in heaven waiting to punish you
 - c. He loves you and wants to save you
 - d. He wants to intercept your life and change the way things are going and where you are going
 4. What exactly did God do?
 - a. He "made us alive together" (v. 5)
 - i. In Greek, this is just one word: *suzóōpoieó*
 - ii. God reanimates someone who is dead spiritually to be alive, to be awake
 - b. "In the majority of occurrences in the New Testament, the verb 'to make alive' is a synonym of 'to raise' from the dead" —Markus Barth
 - c. How can someone be reanimated?

- i. Someone from the outside must do something to reanimate a dead person
 - ii. A corpse can't crawl out of a casket—God reanimated your dead spirit
- D. When did God start loving you?
 - 1. Did He love you when you were lovable, or when you realized that you need Him?
 - 2. He loved you when you were unlovable—when you had no capacity to love
 - a. "Because of His great love with which He loved us" (v. 4)
 - b. Romans 5:8
 - 3. He loved you when you hated Him; He loved you when you ran from Him; He loved you when you had no thought of Him at all
- IV. Watching for God (vv. 6-7)
 - A. Paul used the phrase "in Christ" eighty-five times in his writings
 - 1. God "made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (v. 6)
 - 2. What Paul meant by this is that we are in heavenly places positionally and eventually we will be with God literally
 - 3. Paul was so sure of this that he spoke as though it had already happened—that's the process of salvation
 - B. In the natural, normal progress of the Christian life, we come to several realizations
 - 1. We realize that we are forgiven children of God, but this is just the beginning
 - 2. Next comes the realization that this is not my home—heaven is my home
 - C. Not only do we have peace, forgiveness, and purpose—there are ages yet to come
 - 1. As believers, we ought to be looking forward to that, expecting it, and watching for His return
 - 2. Philippians 3:20
 - 3. I Thessalonians 1:10
 - 4. Titus 2:13
 - D. How are we to wait for Him?
 - 1. Do you eagerly wait for Jesus to return?
 - 2. Does it excite you that He's coming?
 - E. This is the healthy growth of the Christian life:
 - 1. You were dead
 - 2. You're awake and alive
 - 3. You are also aware and watching eagerly for His return
 - F. "That in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus" (v. 7)
 - 1. God loves you so much that it's going to take Him all of eternity to fully reveal that love to you
 - 2. Eternity will become the unfolding revelation of His love
 - 3. Our hope is not in the coming of the Lord as much as in the Lord who is coming
 - a. We're not looking for an event, but a person
 - b. We're waiting for a real person with whom we'll be in heavenly places
 - 4. "A continual looking forward to the eternal world is not (as some modern people think) a form of escapism or wishful thinking, but one of the things a Christian is meant to do.... If you read history you will find that the Christians who did the most

for the present world were just those who thought most of the next.... It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this" —C.S. Lewis

V. Working with God (vv. 8-10)

- A. He gave us life, and we're looking forward to the ages we get to spend with Him
 - 1. But in the meantime, we have the present
 - 2. While we're watching for His return, there are things for us to do here
- B. God's work in you
 - 1. You are His workmanship, His masterpiece
 - 2. In the Greek, this is *poiéma*—an exquisite masterpiece in which someone expresses himself in a literary form
 - 3. You are God's masterpiece in progress; God has an end in mind, and He is committed to working on you to the end (see Philippians 1:6)
 - 4. God is the master sculptor in the business of liberating masterpieces from stone, and He has never yet thrown a single stone away
- C. God's work through you
 - 1. You were created in Christ to do the good works which God has prepared for you
 - 2. His work in you is for a reason—that He might work through you
 - 3. Real fulfillment is to be an instrument through which God works in the world
 - 4. You don't have to reach a certain level for God to work through you
 - a. "God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise" (1 Corinthians 1:27)
 - b. All the people God uses—all of His instruments—are severely flawed, because the only tools He has to work with are human beings
 - c. But because God does glorious work with imperfect tools, He gets more glory
 - 5. You're not saved *by* good works—you're saved *for* good works; He saved you *from* sin *for* service

VI. Conclusion

- A. Paul asked two questions
 - 1. "Who are You, Lord?" (Acts 9:5)
 - 2. He's Jesus Christ, the Lord of all, who gives new life
- B. The second question was "Lord, what do You want me to do?" (Acts 9:6)
 - 1. What are the good works He has prepared for your life, so that no matter what occupation you serve, your real calling is to serve Him and reach people?
 - 2. God wants to make your life a masterpiece, but you only get one canvas
 - 3. May you have many more "but God" moments for service

Figures referenced: Markus Barth, James Montgomery Boice, C.S. Lewis, Martyn Lloyd-Jones

Cross references: Genesis 2:17; Isaiah 53:6; Lamentations 3:22; John 3:7; Acts 9:5-6; Romans 5:8, 12; 1 Corinthians 1:27; 2:14; Philippians 1:6; 3:20; 1 Thessalonians 1:10; Titus 2:13

Greek words: hamartia, peripateó, poiéma, suzópoieó

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