

Raised from Death to Life

Ephesians 2:1-10

Covenant Waterfall, 15 September 2019

Introduction

In February of this year a pastor in Johannesburg called Alph Lukau, brought out a coffin with what appeared to be a dead man in it, during his church service. He then proceeded to tell the congregation how the man had died some days ago, had been in the morgue, and now he had brought him to the church in order to pray that God would raise him to life. So he prayed and suddenly the man in the coffin sat up, mouth gaping and yelling and cheering.

Unfortunately the whole thing was a hoax. People quickly noticed that the guy in the coffin had been breathing before he was “raised to life”, that he was sweating and that he even had his cell phone sticking out of his pocket.

This kind of quackery is unfortunately too common, especially here in Africa. So-called pastors prey on gullible, usually poor people, with this kind of thing.

Yet in the Bible we read accounts of the dead being raised. In fact there are a total of ten times where dead people were raised to life. One of these accounts was the raising of Lazarus in John 11. Lazarus was a friend of Jesus. He fell ill and then died and was buried in a tomb. After being dead for four days, Jesus came and raised him to life.

Now Lazarus’ raising from the dead was a clear miracle. Dead for four days. Have you ever seen a dead body? You know when someone is dead – body is cold, self-evident that there is no life, no soul in them. They are not there. Rigor mortis – body is stiff, skin has changed colour.

Lazarus dead for four days – corpse is far into rigor mortis, already rotting, smelling – as John 11:39 tells us. Yet Jesus walked to the tomb, had the stone rolled away, called out to Lazarus, and he came out alive! True miracle, a sign and a wonder – something God could only do and clearly did!

Can't compare that biblical account of Lazarus being raised from the dead with much of what's peddled as raising dead people today by some folks. Either out and out charlatans, like our Pastor Alph, or possibly resuscitations – people weren't in fact dead, just had stopped breathing or heart stopped beating, then came back. Those are common and happen often.

Now God can do what he wants, and it's quite possible that there have been people who have genuinely been raised from the dead in modern times. Yet for whatever reason it doesn't seem to be the norm, or the way that God chooses to ordinarily work today. The point here is that raising the dead to life is something only God can actually do. We can't raise ourselves from the dead. Nor can we in our own human strength raise anybody else. God has to do it. He's the only one with the power and ability to restore life to a corpse!

Yet while it may not be the norm for God to raise corpses to life today, he is most certainly still in the business of raising the dead. In our text in Ephesians we see that this is true. If we believe in Jesus, the Bible says that we have been raised from death to life. This is what Paul is talking about here in Ephesians 2. Our salvation is not some casual decision that we once made, no, it is a miracle. We were once dead in our sins and God has miraculously raised us up to life in him! ***And because only God can raise the dead, our life in Christ is a gift of grace.***

See this truth in three parts:

- Dead in Sin
- Raised in Christ
- Living in Grace

A. Dead in Sin, vv.1-3

This passage starts off rather shockingly. It tells us in verses 1 & 2 that **“you were *dead* in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked”**. Dead? We were dead? Sounds a bit extreme. Why does the Bible here describe our state prior to being in Christ as “dead”? Surely we had blood flowing through our veins, breathed air into our lungs and our hearts were beating even before we knew the Lord? Yes that's true. But death here is not speaking

about a physical death, rather a spiritual death. We were physically alive, yet dead to God. We had no desire for God, nor even any kind of interest to seek him. We were dead. Why? What caused us to be dead? These first three verses provide us with a detailed answer. Ultimately sin. So let's unpack these three verses which tell us more about the nature of sin and why it made us dead.

Trespasses and sins? It doesn't take much to acknowledge the reality of sin in this world. All the evil out there and injustices that are happening on a daily basis show us that sin is real. You may have heard in the news this week of a young guy called Nicholas Ninow. He's on trial now for raping a little seven year old girl. So shocking, so tragic. When many of us think of a sinner, that's the kind of person we think of – some sicko, bent on doing evil.

Surely we're not like that? We may make the odd mistake here and there, but surely we are mostly good inside? We've lived decent lives, haven't murdered any one, or stolen anything. The problem with thinking like this is that we make ourselves the standard of goodness. Surely that's not a wise measure to use, surely we need something more certain than our own frail consciences?

The meaning of "trespass" is that we have crossed a line, we have violated some standard that's external to ourselves. That standard is God's law. God alone is the one who determines what is right and wrong. The reality is that when we measure ourselves against God's law, contained in the Bible, then every single one of us falls horribly short. We stand guilty as sinners because we've all not loved God with our whole heart, soul and strength and we have failed to love our neighbours as ourselves.

Our problem is that we're actually hard-wired to sin from the outset. We weren't born neutral and then had the choice to do either good or bad. We were born bad and since then have actively done bad things. Verse 3 says that we **"were by nature children of wrath."** Evil is within our nature because it's been in our DNA from our first parents, Adam and Eve. Because they rebelled against God in the Garden of Eden, we've inherited from them the bent to rebel against God too.

While our sin nature is inherited, it does not mean that we're just victims of it. No, we've actively chosen to sin. Verse 2 says that we **"once walked"** in sin. There was a time when we

willingly walked in sin, chose to rebel against God ourselves. Not just Adam's fault, but ours too.

Verses 2-3 tells us that as we walked in our sins, we followed the **"prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience among whom we all once lived..."** We were not just making bad choices as sinners, but we were actually following Satan himself (prince of the power of the air) and were under his evil spiritual power. We were held under his sway and completely dominated by him.

Further, we carried out the **"passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind."** (v.3). Our sinfulness manifested in our behaviour – we followed our hearts, did whatever felt good, satisfied our fleshly appetites. Dominated by our own urgings and carnal instincts. Lived with no fear of God, did things only to please ourselves. Condition so bad that unable to do otherwise. Outside of Christ we don't choose to do the right thing, we actually don't want to do the right thing, we're not inclined to do the right thing. It's because our hearts are dead to God because of sin that we act like this.

Because of all this, verse 3 says that we **"were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind."** The result of our sinfulness and rebellion is that we, along with every other human being, deserve God's wrath.

Do we see that, outside of Christ, because we were dead to God - absolutely dominated by sin, by Satan, and our worldly passions – we're unable to help ourselves. The solution to our spiritual deadness cannot in any way come from within us. A dead person cannot resurrect himself. Someone has to reach down to us and raise us from the dead...

B. Raised in Christ, vv.4-7

Verses 4-5 continue: **"But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved."**

The only reason any of us believes in Jesus is because God first chose to have mercy upon us and set his love upon us. No other reason. Not anything within me, not my actions, my choices – all impossible as we were still dead when God chose to have mercy on us. All his

initiative. He reached down to us while we were dead, in the muck and mire, while we were pursuing a lifestyle of sin, actively in rebellion against him and not even seeking him out. He came and found us. We didn't find him.

We need to understand that God breathed his Spirit into us, softened our hard hearts, raised our dead hearts to life, before we were even able to respond to him in faith. The only reason we were able to respond to God was because the Holy Spirit began to first work in us. Only God can raise the dead, that's why our salvation in him is by grace alone – a gift all from him.

So we can see that if we're a believer it's because God raised us from the dead. He raised us to a life in Christ. Verses 6-7 continue: **"and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷ so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus."**

Last week we looked at the exalted Christ in the previous chapter and saw two important truths about Jesus: Firstly that he was raised from the dead. And secondly that he is seated at the right hand of God in heavenly places.

Now in these verses we see that we've been raised from the dead up to life *with Jesus*. So we identify with Jesus in his resurrection. How? As God sovereignly raised Jesus from the dead, so has he sovereignly raised us from the dead. Our resurrection, like that of Jesus' is all God's work. We've been raised to life from death in sin to enjoy abundant life in Christ now, in this age.

But we will also be raised from the dead in the future too. Life for those of us who are in Christ does not end when we die. Instead, we are promised in 1 Corinthians 15 that we will be raised up from the grave in Christ in a new resurrection body – a body fit for eternal life, one that will never grow old and decay and get frail and sick. We'll have a resurrection body like the one Jesus has now in heaven.

As Jesus was raised to be seated on the right hand of the Father in heavenly places, so are we raised in order to be seated with him in heavenly places, as verse 6 says. What does this mean? In a mysterious way, even now, we are seated with Christ in heavenly places. This describes the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives – he's transforming us to be more like Christ

and giving us glimpses of the age to come. In real way, we are seated in heavenly places with Christ when we come into his presence during worship, hear his Word preached to us, or when we are in prayer and even as we partake of the Lord's Supper. In all these things, God draws closer to us by his Spirit and in a mysterious way, lifts us up to be seated with Christ in heavenly places.

Yet this is also describing our future reign with Christ. As Jesus now reigns on the right hand of the Father in the heavenly places, so will we reign with Christ in the new creation, seated with him in heavenly places. Revelation 22 gives us an incredible glimpse of what awaits us in the future. In verse 5 it says that we will reign forever with the Lord God himself! We will have some part to play in ruling with God in the new heavens and the new earth – blows your mind!

C. Living in Grace, vv.8-10

“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast”

Paul now changes gear and reflects on this resurrection work that God has performed in us. He declares here probably one of the clearest expressions of the gospel in Scripture: that we have been saved by grace through faith.

In other words – our resurrection from the dead, the fact that God chose to set his love upon us, our salvation in Christ – *is a gift from God*. That's the meaning of grace. Where God was right to punish us, as the penalty for our sins is death (Rom 6:23), instead he shows us favour. God's gift to us of undeserved favour instead of wrath – that's grace, that's the gospel.

The only way we receive all this is by faith. Sounds too good to be true – just receive this by faith. Don't need to earn it, don't need to think that you have to get your life in order to get it, don't need to jump through any hoops – just receive this good news by faith alone!

Receiving this grace from God by faith, believing the gospel, means now that your sins are forgiven and you have been made right with God. You can come before him with a clean

conscience, know him as your Father, have the assurance that nothing will be able to separate you from God and know that you will be raised up with him on the Last Day.

All this is none of our own doing – all a gift from God. None of us are Christians because we are in some way better than those who don't believe, or more intelligent, or more prone to do good things, or have any kind of merit within ourselves. If this was the case, then we would be able to boast about our salvation, as if we had a part to play in it or in some way earned it. Because it's all from God, it's precisely why we can't boast. None of it is our own doing. Our good works don't in any way earn our way to God, we're saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone!

We were dead, rotting away in the folly of our sins, not even seeking after God, yet he came down to us in love and raised us up from the dead, rescuing us from a punishment we deserved and instead granting us this new life in Christ. All his work, that's why it's a gift – we receive it from him for free!

Verse 10 concludes by saying, **“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”** Some will say that if God has saved us freely by his grace, and forgiven us our sins, then surely we can just live how we please as God will forgive us anyway? If that's our thinking, then we've missed the point of the gospel.

Good works certainly don't save us. But good works are a result of true faith in Jesus. It's clear in this verse that God actually created us to do good works – to honour him with our lives, to obey his Word, to live lives that glorify his name. He prepared these good works ahead of time, that we would walk in them, empowered by the Holy Spirit to do so.

So the proof is in the pudding. At the beginning of the chapter, in verse 2, Paul characterised a life outside of Christ as “walking in sin”. And here in verse 10, he characterises a life in Christ as “walking in good works.” Here we have the fundamental difference between the dead man in sin and the man who has been raised to life in Christ Jesus – a transformed life that glorifies God. All as a result of believing the gospel, flows from having received God's gift of grace and having been raised to life in Christ.

Conclusion

Romans 6:23 says that **“the wages of sin is death.”** If you are still pursuing a life independently from God, following the passions of your flesh and the desires of your body and mind, then know this – that God will be just to reward you with death that is eternal. But it doesn’t have to be that way, the verse carries on to say that **“the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”**

For those of us in Christ, let us never take for granted God’s great gift of grace to us. We were dead in our sins, pursuing our rebellion against God, undeserving of God’s grace. We were stinking corpses, like Lazarus – dead in the tomb and unable to even seek God. Yet because of no other reason than his love for us, God reached down to us in Christ, and miraculously raised us up from the dead. Forgave us our sins, restored us to our Father – ***for by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God!***

Amen