

Text: Ephesians 2.1-10
St Stephen's

July 18th, 2004
Sun AM

Up To The High Palace

Today we continue a **new sermon series** called “The Forever Kingdom” on Ephesians - considered by many as the **greatest** of Paul’s letters. Last week we looked at the **wealth** that Christ has given us and the **great purpose** at the center of the universe – to unite all things in Christ. This week as we turn to Chapter 2 I am reminded of one of the early TV shows I watched growing up. “**This Is Your Life**”... It ran from 1952 – 1961 and received 2 Emmy awards. *“Each show opened with the host surprising an unsuspecting guest, saying “this is your life.” They would go through the high points in his life, and would now and then listen to the voice of an offstage guest. The guest of honor would try to guess whose voice it was - a relative, friend, teacher, etc. - and then the offstage guest would come out to a celebration and reunion.*

The verses we are looking at today are the story of your life. You won’t like the first half of the show! But make sure you stick around for the second half. You won’t hardly believe it! Let’s start with the first half. God wants us to...

1) Take a Sober Look at Who You Were...

- We Were **Disobedient**...

“As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins...” Eph 2:1
Not much argument about the disobedience issue. I was a rebel.

- We Were **Drifting**...

“you followed the ways of this world” Eph 2.2

That’s what happens when you just blend in with what everyone else is doing. You live for fashion. You want to be rich. You go for power over people. You say, “I only believe in what I see”. You just drift along, float downstream. Not much argument here, either.

- We Were **Deceived**...

“you followed the... ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.”

Eph 2.2

When you live a life of rebellion and you just drift with the culture, Paul says there is **something else going on** that you may not be able to see. You are deceived by Satan. Did you know that Satan’s favorite tools are lies and

temptation (John 8.44; Matt 4.3). That's why he is called in scripture the tempter and the father of lies. He lies about something, and you swallow it. He tempts you, and you give in.

(Right about now you might think, "I'm not sure I like this show, 'This is your life'. It's about time for a commercial break...!" But hang on here a little bit.)

- We Were **Dead**...

"In the past you were spiritually dead because of your sins and the things you did against God. Yes, in the past you lived the way the world lives..."
Eph 2:1-2 (NCV)

You walk up to someone and tell them that they are dead, and most **people object**, saying, "Not yet, I'm not. I am still walking around, breathing!" But Paul knows that; **circle** the words "*you lived*". He says it is a death "in which you used to live." I think the New Century Version on the screen translates it very well. It is a "spiritual death", a living death. This happens...

Because sin severs our relationship with God.

When we sin we are cut off from our source of life. Look at Eph 4.18...

"They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God..." Eph 4:18

That can happen, even while you are still alive. Then there is one last word...

- We Were **Doomed**...

"We were born with an evil nature, and we were under God's anger (wrath) just like everyone else." Eph 2:3 (NLT)

God's anger is literally his "wrath". Wrath means God's holy and absolute opposition to evil and rebellion, his refusal to compromise with it, and his resolve to condemn it.

Well, that's the first half of the show, "This is your life." How's you like it? **It is a pretty sobering set of words:** disobedient, drifting, deceived, dead and doomed. We think... "I think they got the wrong guy!" But look at what Paul says...

All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. Eph 2:3

We think... you know, God must be talking about all those **non-Christians** out there. But you did you notice that this letter was **written to Christians**, not unbelievers. I think God saves some of the toughest truth about who we are for **after our conversion**. Because we will never understand the extent of his grace until we understand the extent of our trouble. So watching the **first half** of the show is important. But then comes the **second half...**

2) Lay Both Hands on Who He's Made You...

“But God is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so very much...”

Eph 2:4 (NLT)

Have you ever thought about what a **powerful word “but”** is. Have you ever had a supervisory conversation at work, starting out with praise a paragraph or two of praise. And you keep waiting for one little word, “but...”. Then comes the correction. Or it can be a good thing, “It is raining outside, ‘**but**’ good weather is coming.” I love these two little words, **“But God...”**

- **Noah** was facing 40 days of rain, “But God...”
- A shepherd boy named **David** looked across a battle line at a giant named Goliath, “But God...”
- **Jonah** was tossed overboard in a storm and found himself in the belly of a whale, “But God...”
- A **woman caught in adultery** was surrounded by men ready to kill for their religion, “But God...”
- A **prodigal son** walked out on his family and his faith and squandered all he had been given, “But God...”
- The **disciples** faced the task of feeding thousands of men and women and all they had was the sack lunch of a young boy, “But God...”
- **Paul** was in prison for his faith in Jesus and eventually was martyred, “But God...”

You may be in more trouble than you have ever known. I have two words to say to you. *“But God is so rich in mercy, and he loves us so very much...”*

Paul then says something astounding. He says...

“God made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions... and God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly

realms in Christ Jesus...” Eph 2:5-6

Notice **the verbs** carefully.

- God ***made us alive*** with Christ
- God ***raised us up*** with Christ
- God ***seated us*** in heavenly places with Christ

In the Nicene **Creed** we confess:

On the third day [Jesus] rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; [Jesus] ascended into heaven and [Jesus] is seated at the right hand of the Father.

Paul says **this has** not only happened **to Jesus**; it has **also happened to Jesus’ followers!**

Let me explain it like this. God has given us a “**dual citizenship**”; we have ***two addresses***. One of my addresses is 721 Beaver St, Sewickley. Pa. USA. Planet Earth. But I have **another address**. So do you. Heaven. The Throne Room. **Seated** (don’t miss the word) next to the King. “Seated” means we already share in his victory over death. We already share in his reign over evil. I love these words Paul wrote that from his jail cell in Rome.

“there’s far more to life for us. We’re citizens of high heaven!”

Phil 3:20 (The Message)

Now I want to ask you a very, very important **question**. **These are the central** acts of our salvation. Here’s the question: **How does all this happen?** How are we saved? Paul has an answer for it, and it comes from one of the most important sentences of scripture that I ever memorized.

“By Grace, Through Faith... Not by Works”

“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast.”

Eph 2:8-9

If you were to go out and ask ten people, “**How do you get saved?**”, you’d get the same answers most of the time. *“Just work real hard and try to follow God and do your best... Be sincere and be nice to people... just try to do good and make sure that you do more good in your life than bad because God grades on the curve - and if you do your part, then God will do his part.”*

But Paul says something very different – look at the phrases – it is “*not from yourselves*” and “*not by works*”, he is saying that it is **not dependent upon your actions or efforts**.

It is easier to understand the phrase, “not by works”, when you think about your experience on **your job**. You work all month. Payday comes and **you expect** to get your wages. We think... “I’ve earned it. I’ve worked for it. I am owed it. I deserve it. It is due to me.” And you would be right.

Then **we make this jump**. We think that God’s spiritual economy works the same way. For example, complete these common American phrases:

“There’s no such thing as a free... lunch.”

“There is no gain without ... pain.” And here comes the jump...

“God helps those who ... help themselves.”

But in God’s spiritual economy... there is no wage relationship that puts God in debt to us. Paul says that salvation can never be earned. Never be deserved. Not unless you do everything **perfectly**. But you don’t. And you can’t. God wants us to understand that. You don’t, and you can’t, and God won’t grade us on a curve. He won’t lower the standards. So it only comes “By Grace, Through Faith... Not by Works”

- Salvation is not based on my **performance**. It’s based on God’s **promise**.
- It’s not based on my **merit**. It’s based on God’s **mercy**.
- It’s not based on my **goodness**. It’s based on God’s **grace**.
- Not on what I “**do**” but on what God’s “**done**”.
- It is a **gift** to be received not a **reward** to be earned.

Part of the reason God does it like this is “**so that no one can boast.**”

Can you imagine **how miserable we would be in heaven** if everybody got there by working for it and earning it? If we got to heaven by our works... every time we saw each other, we would want to spend all our time telling each other all we did to get there. Everybody would be **bragging**. Forever! That would get old!

I met a man in one of the churches I pastored... let’s call him **Dan**. He held out his hand and introduced himself to me with these words... “**Say, ‘Thank you, Dan!’**” I was taken aback. He said it again... and a third time. Finally I said, “Thank you, Dan.” Then he explained - he was an out of town visitor, but had

been one of the early members of the church who had worked hard to build the church, and he felt I should know about his good work and thank him for it.

That was undoubtedly true. But it really rubbed me the wrong way! I couldn't help but wonder if in the day when he stands before Jesus he will look Jesus in the eye and hold out his hand and introduce himself with the same words... **“Say, ‘Thank you, Dan.’”**

Paul says... *“not by works, so that no one can boast.”* God wants us to get it straight **where the credit belongs**. It all belongs to him. Because He's the one who paid for it. Grace is **free** but it is **not cheap** because somebody has to pay for it. It cost Christ His life. It cost God His own Son. Paul says that all this comes to us because of God's...

“mercy” (vs 4a), “love” (vs 4b), “grace” (vv 5,8), & “kindness” (vs 7),

As a matter of fact, Paul even says here that God is **putting his grace on cosmic display for the ages to come** – that's what he wants to do - you know how? By including you and me in his grace. You and I are the evidence of his mercy!

“Saving is all his idea, and all his work. All we do is trust him enough to let him do it. It's God's gift from start to finish! We don't play the major role. If we did, we'd probably go around bragging that we'd done the whole thing!”

Eph 2:8-9 (The Message)

Now if all this is true, I want to finish with one thought...

3) Join Him in the Life He's Prepared For You...

For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. Eph 2:10

Paul says that God wants us to join him in a life of mercy and grace. Take the love God has given to you and pass it on. Talk about it. Do mercy. Do grace. Be kind. Join Jesus. Do what he is doing. We are not saved **by** good works, but we are created **for** good works. Don't miss out on it.

Prayer:

Today these words are for me, “But God”...

I want to receive the gift... I want to live the life...