
Living Faithfully in the Riches of God's Grace

To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ...(Ephesians 3:8)

And You Were Dead... (Part 1)

Ephesians 2:1-3

1 And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, 2 in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. 3 Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.

A few weeks ago I was able to participate in a carry/conceal class; a class that to informed and instructed me concerning the laws as well as seeking to prepare me for the responsibility of carrying a firearm. A couple of days before the class, I went to the gun shop with Laura to check things out and to ask the proprietor of the gun shop some questions about the class. Ron, the proprietor's name, was eager to show off us new "toy" taking us to a larger room which contained a huge projector, a huge screen, simulated handguns and a computer. In totally, it was a \$30,000 video game; a simulator, the same kind of simulator that is used by big law enforcement departments to train their personnel when to shoot and when not to shoot. This is the only such simulator in Northwest Arkansas. With that said, while Ron walked us through some of the "simulations" used to train officers, what he really wanted to show us was the "entertainment" menu. He proceeded to open up a scenario where he found himself in a warehouse of sorts. The scene was dark and eerie, when from around a corner came this zombie...yes, zombie, which Ron proceeded to "take out" with his simulated gun. At first it was just a zombie here and there, but after a while there were lots of zombies coming at him. The excitement on the face this late 40, early 50 year old man was priceless as he found this part of the simulator much more thrilling. I got a kick out of it.

And I remember wondering at the time, what is it about zombies that have captured the attention of so many people? A few years back there was a movie that came out called World War Z, a thriller described as a United Nations employee who had to transverse the world in a race against time to stop the Zombie pandemic that was toppling armies and governments, and threatening to destroy humanity itself. This coupled with numbers of video games where zombies are the key enemies makes me wonder, what is the fascination with zombies? There is a morbid fascination with death, dying, and the dead among a large percentage of our population. And this is especially true in the realm of zombie literature. Zombies – if you don't already know - are dead people who have somehow returned to life. For whatever reason that is unclear to me, zombies have an insatiable desire for human flesh and so they attack live people. And for some reason, our culture is fascinated by such living dead.

For the record, I do not in zombies, at least as depicted in movies, video games and the like. Scripture is clear that when a person dies he or she goes either to Heaven or Hell. They do not come back to either hunt or to eat the living and for this we can be thankful to God! So then, why do I mention zombies to you this morning? I mention them because in Ephesians 2:1-3, we are presented with a description of people who might rightly hold certain characteristics of zombies. In fact, I believe it was James Montgomery Boice, late pastor of Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia who said that Ephesians 2:1-3 is a depiction of what he called "spiritual zombies" – the living dead. For all around us are people who are, in biblical terms, the living dead. They are born, they live, they work, they marry, they reproduce, they find pleasure, they love, they hate, they fight, they give, they receive, they go on vacation, and they even sit in churches. Some may even live rich, full lives, and yet they are very much dead. It is entirely

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possible that there are some such living dead among us right now. We are literally surrounded by spiritual zombies.

As we come to Ephesians 2:1-10, we are looking at one of the most incredible passages of Scripture. In our text we find Paul moving from eternity past, having explained all that God had done to prepare us for salvation in chapter 1; and bringing us into time, revealing for his readers the very process of salvation, the work of God that draws sinners into His eternal plan. If we are to understand Ephesians 2:1-10, and most especially our text this morning in verses 1-3, we must remember that Paul is building here off of 1:19, that we might know...*"what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe."* If we are to know the surpassing greatness of God's power in our salvation, we must first know the surpassing greatness of our sinful condition before God. It was J. C. Ryle who rightly noted, *"Christ is never fully valued until sin is clearly seen."*

Ephesians 2:1-3 is the most pointed and pessimistic picture of the human condition apart from Christ found anywhere. In these three verses Paul plunges us into the depths of pessimism concerning man. He does this so that he can then, beginning in verse 4, raise us to the heights of optimism concerning God and how God's grace saves such helpless sinners as us.

If we are to view ourselves rightly, we need to have a biblical understanding of our condition. The problem is that both the world and even many in the church have a misunderstanding concerning the human condition. Let me give you the three basic ways in which humanity tends to view itself.

First, there are those who believe that people are fundamentally good; they are okay! These are those who see people as basically healthy as opposed to sick or dead. While acknowledging that people are not as healthy as they could be, they believe that through evolution, economic development and time, people are getting better and better; not yet perfect, but better. The problem with this view is that if man's nature is only slightly flawed, then why has it not already become perfect? Why do we still have hostilities, wars, greed, lust and other society harming imperfections?

There is a second view of humanity that understands that man is not well at all but rather is sick, even mortally sick. However, his condition is not hopeless, for as long as he is alive, then he has a chance, some hope of recovering on his own.

As most you know, my mother-in-law had emergency brain surgery back in January. Amazing, the next day after having a piece of her skull removed, she was up talking and walking. But within the next couple of days, because of brain swelling, Sue fell into a deep sleep. In a span of time from Saturday, the day after the surgery where things looked so good, until Wednesday, just five days later, three of the doctors pulled me aside and said to prepare the family for the worst because the situation was hopeless. Sue's condition was mortal. But thank God that neither we, nor the neurosurgeon gave up. The neurosurgeon wanted to try something, to give her steroids to reduce the swelling. He did not know if it would work; but our thinking was so long as she was alive, there was an opportunity for God to work. And you know the rest of the story. Sue did wake up, has been recovering, did attend her grandson's wedding in March and is looking forward to seeing her granddaughter's wedding in the Fall.

I share this testimony because while it is inspirational; while it is a reflection of God doing an extraordinary thing in Sue's life; this is not the depiction in the bible of the human condition – mortally ill but still having a chance, a shot at recovery.

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This brings us to the third view of the human condition, the biblical view which certainly agrees with the second view, that man is not well; but takes it one step further. Paul's diagnosis of man's condition as seen in verse 1 is that he is dead – that so far as a relationship with God goes, man is unable and incapable of doing anything to right himself with God. This is what is meant by the phrase – “total inability” – that man has no capacity in himself to be right with God. Man is not mostly dead; he is most assuredly completely dead when it comes to God. Like a spiritual zombie, the sinner is unable to make a single move toward God; to think a single thought about God, or even correctly respond to God – that is until God first does something to bring that spiritual zombie to life; which is what we will see later in Ephesians 2.

Do not think that I am getting lost in the weeds here. Remember what J.C. Ryle said, *“Christ is never fully valued until sin is clearly seen.”* It is my desire to unpack Ephesians 2:1-3 in such a way that allows us to clearly see sin and the exceeding sinfulness of sin so that we might be in awe of the exceeding grace revealed to us in the person of Jesus Christ.

Now then, I had mentioned a phrase a moment ago, “total inability” and defined it as man having no ability in himself to make himself right with God. This always brings up the question of man's will. Does man have a free will to choose or not to choose God? Martin Luther addressed this question and concluded that man's will is not “free” but rather is in bondage. And whether we read the apostle Paul's letters, or Augustine, John Calvin, Martin Luther, Jonathan Edwards or even John MacArthur, all are united in saying that until the unexpected, undeserved grace of God quickens the human heart and mind, no one will ever willingly turn to God or embrace the offer of salvation. Sin enslaves, keeps in bondage. Sin is at enmity with God and runs from God rather than to God.

We might rightly say that people have free will, if by that we mean they have a mind to choose that which their mind deems best. The problem then is not with the will itself, but rather with man's moral nature; a sin-corrupted; anti-God nature which is always opposed to God. In this sense then, the mind or will is free; always choosing that which we determine to be best for us in any given situation. The problem is that we always choose or judge wrongly. So long as the will is in bondage to sin, so long as we are, as Ephesians 2:1 declares, “dead” – we will always think God and His ways most undesirable and will therefore resist Him and reject His gospel. Let me say it again, *“Christ is never fully valued until sin is clearly seen.”*

And let me make one more comment about this being dead business before we examine our text. Most of us are familiar with Romans 6:23 which says that the wages, or payment for sin is death. Such a statement begs a question, “Are we sinners because we sin; or do we sin because we are sinners?” The first statement implies that we become sinners; that we are sinners because we sin. Yet the Bible is clear that we are “conceived in sin” – that the sin nature of Adam is transmitted to us. We do not become sinners; being born without a sin nature and earning such a nature; rather we are born sinners and thus we will sin. We do not become spiritually dead because we sin; we are spiritually dead because we are by nature sinful. So, we are born in a condition that is death, separated from God. We are born spiritually dead while being physically alive. We are dead to God, dead to spiritual life; dead to truth, to righteousness, true peace and every good thing. *“Christ is never fully valued until sin is clearly seen.”* Before Christ we are spiritual zombies, walking corpses, the living dead. As one preacher put it, such people are, “an offense to God's nostrils. These decaying spiritual corpses stink.”

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With all this background, let us turn our attention to the first verse of our text, Ephesians 2:1 where we read, *And you were dead in your trespasses and sins.* These words begin a series of dark, disturbing descriptions of every person's condition before coming to Christ. Here Paul speaks of the past condition of every believer along with the present condition of everyone else along with the circumstances that result from that condition.

I. Our Condition (2:1a)

And you were dead...

Paul begins by reminding his readers that they were "dead". The Greek word literally reads, "a corpse; a dead body." The way Paul uses the word, it speaks of a person who lacks any spiritual life; that is, a spiritually dead person – one who is unable to react or respond to God. Here then is what we mean by speaking of "lost sinners" – they are lost because they are utterly unable to make a move toward finding God. Dead people are both incapable of doing anything and thus unwilling to do anything. You know this to be true of death. If you have been to a funeral, or present before a dead body, you know that it is unable to respond to any impulse, or stimuli. The dead body, due to a lack of power and ability cannot do anything. When a person dies, all that is left is an empty shell. They can no longer hear, see, think, or respond to anything. I have seen people caress the hair of their departed loved ones; but it solicits no response. They may speak a word of affection, but nothing is heard. That body that was once alive is empty, lifeless, void. This is what happens when a physical body dies and now Paul is using this as a perfect illustration of those who do not know the Lord Jesus Christ.

Before Christ everyone is dead. And what is death? Not to be overly simplistic, but the opposite of death is...life. So a better question you need to be able to answer is this; what is life? Let us look and see what Jesus said is life. In John 17:3 Jesus said this – *"And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent."* According to Jesus, the only people that are truly alive are those who truly know God and know Him through faith in Jesus Christ. The apostle John repeats this teaching of Jesus in 1 John 5:12 saying, *"He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life."* He who has faith in Jesus is alive; he who does not have faith in Christ is dead. Before Christ we were all "dead." Those who are dead to God; dead to Christ may indeed be alive to the world. They love, they laugh, they find pleasures in this world but our text says they are dead even as they live. They are spiritual zombies – not knowing, sensing, or even caring about things and person of God.

If all people before Christ are dead; not sick; not ill; not slightly warped, or partially deficient; then how could anyone suggest that a person has the ability to approach God whenever and however he wants to? Since sinners are said to be dead, then God must initiate salvation. Do we find this in the Scriptures? Look with me at John 6:44. There we read... *"No one can (speaks of ability; not may speaking of permission, but no ability) come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day."* And then look at verse 65 where Jesus says, *"For this reason I have said to you, that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted him from the Father."*

It is not that sinners are merely sick and need healing; beloved, sinners are dead and in need of resurrection; to experience the same power of God that raised Jesus from the dead in their lives. Looking down at Ephesians 2:5, we see that we had to be "made alive" and in John 3:3 Jesus would say we must be "born again." Beloved, *"Christ is never fully valued until sin is*

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clearly seen." Before Christ we were dead, that was our condition. Romans 5:12 confirms this for us saying, *Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned* — Death is our condition before Christ and according to Ephesians 2, John 3, Romans 3 and a host of other passages, until God intervenes and raises us from the dead, we will be lost in sin.

If you have truly called upon the name of Jesus Christ for salvation, then you are dead. This explains why the things of God mean nothing to you. This explains why you never "feel" anything when you come to church. This explains why the things that move the hearts of the redeemed around you never move your heart. You are dead, dead to God, dead in your sins and you must be born again! The dead find spiritual truth boring. As we will come to see in verses 2-3, such persons are not bored by worldly things; in fact they are most motivated by the things that appeal to their flesh. These are the spiritually dead and are in need of the power of God to resurrect them for such a state. This is where every single person finds themselves before Christ.

That is why lost people come to church and hear the Gospel and leave unmoved by the things of God. The dead find spiritual truth boring. God's word holds no interest for the lost. The fact that they are physically alive is proven by the deeds mentioned in verses 2-3. They are not bored with worldly things; in fact, they find their meaning in the things that appeal to the flesh. They are spiritually dead and need a resurrection! Have you had such an encounter with the power of God? Do you know that Jesus has come to your spiritual tomb and has awakened you from your spiritual death like He awakened Lazarus only in a more extraordinary way, calling you to come forth from your dead stupor? Having been a spiritual zombie, do you know that you have been granted the new birth (John 3:3, 7); that you have been "made alive" (Ephesians 2:5), that you are a "new creature" (2 Corinthians 5:17)?

Beloved, do the things of God now captivate you? Do you thank God, I mean really thank for who He is; for sending His Son, for giving you His Word, for fellowship in His house with His people, for the joy of worshipping in His presence; do such things now thrill your soul? If not, why not? Perhaps you have not come to see sin clearly enough so that you might truly value Christ. If you have been brought back from the dead, then you know very well the joy of which I speak. If you have not, then you are dead to the things of God. And dead people do not need rehabilitation; they do not need religion; they need a resurrection! They need to be born again. And I submit to you that the Father is drawing you even now as I speak. He is calling you to Christ. He stands ready to breathe the breath of life into your dead spirit. Come to Jesus and be saved from this condition of being dead. Come experience now the grace of God that saves you and brings God glory. Be this day transferred from the domain of darkness and death to the kingdom of light in the Lord Jesus Christ.

II. Our Circumstances (2:1b)

And you were dead in your trespasses and sins...

Moving rapidly along in our one and only verse, having noted our condition as being dead, Paul next speaks of the circumstances the flow out of such a condition. For being dead spiritually does not mean a person is dead physically, as each one of us is very aware. Paul says that we were dead "in" something. The word "in" speaks of a sphere or realm in which this spiritually dead move and live. There are two details given to us by Paul concerning the circumstances of the dead; they are dead in "trespasses and sins." Let us consider these two words.

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First we have “trespasses” – a word that literally means “a falling over a line or boundary.” Think of a “no trespassing” sign. It means, “Don’t cross this line, this fence; this boundary.” I would have you notice that Paul says we were dead in our “trespasses” – plural, indicating that this was not a one-time occurrence, but that we, because of our condition, crossed the line over and over again. And so the word “trespasses” in context speaks of deviating from the truth; it is the slip or fall of a person into the wrong direction. And so, a trespass takes place when a person crosses the clear boundary that has been established by God. God draws the line and tells humanity that they must not to go beyond that point. The sinner, because it is his nature, willfully, freely, enthusiastically steps over that boundary and having done so, they are guilty of trespassing, having crossed God’s boundary and this circumstance of crossing God’s line indicates they are dead to God.

In addition to “trespasses” Paul uses the word “sins” – a word that means simply, “to miss the mark.” It is an archer’s term, meaning that the arrow has not hit its target. And so, the word came to be used to speak of falling short of some goal, standard or purpose. Thus Paul says in Romans 3:23, “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” We have all, because of our condition of deadness, missed the mark and fall short; completely missing God’s perfect standards of holiness and righteousness. The word “*harmartias*” – translated “sins” here is the most common word used to describe sin in the New Testament being used about 173 times.

So, we have “*trespasses and sins.*” These are not two words that describe two different types of God-dishonoring activity. Rather, Paul uses these two words to describe the great depth and horror of the sinfulness of those who are spiritually dead. Being “dead” is the sinner’s condition – acting out in “trespasses and sins” is sinner’s response to that condition. These two words picture a sphere in which the dead person finds himself and that condition is demonstrated by the very things the sinner does. The sinner reveals his condition of sinfulness through his sinful deeds.

In other words, a person does not “become” a liar because he lies; rather he lies because he is already a liar. Likewise, a person does not “become” a murderer because he kills; rather he kills because there is already murder, anger, hatred in his heart. And so the cycle goes. We do not become sinners because we sin; we sin because we are sinners! Every individual act of sin, whatever that sin might be, is simply a reflection of a sinful heart. And the wages of sin is...death (Romans 6:23) and Ephesians 2:1 tells us not that we are going to die if we sin but rather that we are already dead and that is why we sin.

“But wait, Pastor, if everyone is the same; all dead in trespasses and sins; then why do we not all exhibit the same decrees of sin; why is that we do not all sin alike?” Every sinner is indeed dead, our text affirms that, but not every sinner’s spiritual decay is at the same rate. Imagine a Civil War battlefield two days after a conflict. We might find 100 dead bodies; they would all have that in common; but they would be found in differing stages of decay, right? They are all just as dead. The ones who been dead longer would be no more dead than those who have just been killed because dead is dead!

There is an interesting parallel for us in the gospels. In the gospels it is recorded that Jesus raised three people from the dead; the daughter of Jairus (Mark 5:22-42); the son of the widow of Nain (Luke 7:11-15), and Lazarus (John 11). A reading of each of these texts would indicate that the daughter of Jairus had been for just a few minutes when Jesus arrived. She evidently looked as though she was merely asleep, still warm to the touch and yet she was dead.

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The account of widow of Nain's son indicated that he had been dead for a few hours as they were carrying his body away to be buried as Jesus passed by. The boy's body would have been cold, but the process of decomposition had not yet fully started; yet he was still dead! And then we have Lazarus. He had been dead for four days by the time Jesus came to his tomb. Lazarus had been dead long enough that when Jesus commanded the gravestone to be removed, Martha was concerned about the smell. To put it in the old King James, Martha said, "*Lord, by this time he stinketh: for he hath been dead four days*" (John 11:39). Lazarus was dead!

Why do I share this with you? Because these physical deaths illustrate a truth about spiritual death. We find all three of these individuals in differing degrees of decomposition and yet they were all dead. With regard to spiritual death, we need to realize every person who is not saved is dead in his or her sins. The spiritually dead good boy or girl in Awana is just as dead as the habitual drug addict face down in the gutter. The spiritually dead church attendee is just as dead as the Islamic terrorist beheading people! The only difference between these dead is their degree of composition.

Listen well beloved; the deeds of your flesh are an indication of the allegiance of your heart. In Romans 8:5-8 we read, "*5 For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. 6 For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, 7 because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so, 8 and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.*"

Those in the flesh are in what? In death! Such a dead person is not "*in*" a saving relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ, is dead "*in*" their "trespasses and sins." To put it another way, they are dead even while they live in the world. They are dead even while they live out their sinful lives. This is the realm they live in; a realm in which Paul says there in Romans 8:8 in which they "*cannot please God.*" Dead is dead and until God does something, they cannot even move toward God. This is the exceeding sinfulness of sin. And remember, "*Christ is never fully valued until sin is clearly seen.*"

But Pastor, I have seen lost people; dead people try to come to God. Perhaps you have. The world is filled with people who try to reach God based on their own efforts, according to their old "dead" and godless ways of religious activity. Yet they will never reach Him this way. For all the religious activity in the world, if it is not by "faith in the Lord Jesus" – it is the most hell-damning waste of time.

I have used this illustration before, but as a young boy, I grew up in a little town called Seal Beach. I remember playing in the surf and looking out to see an island called Catalina, some 26 miles out. Do you realize that there is not one person who can jump from the Seal Beach pier to the island? Well, the very young and the very old cannot jump far at all. To be sure, some of the young adults and the physically strong might jump a little farther. Any athletes might jump farther still. And yet not one of them "can" reach the island. They will all fall short.

And so it is for those who are dead in the realm of trespasses and sins. Yes, they may be love their families yes they may do model citizens; yes, they may even serve in the church. But, if they are dead, they are just like those trying to jump off the Seal Beach pier to reach the island. It is an exercise in utter futility. Not one person is saved based on how good he or she is; how religious they might be; or even how far they can jump in God's direction. Salvation, as we will

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see most clearly in Ephesians 2:8, comes only by God's grace alone. Salvation comes when a person turns to Jesus Christ by faith, believing on the Lord Jesus Christ to be saved (Acts 16:31). But because that person is dead, he or she cannot make the first move, God must do that calling the dead sinner first to life; then to faith and then they come! And just in case you are fearful that God might not be making that first move for you; let me assure you He is. He is calling you today, right now, call upon the name of the Lord and be saved!

Let me close by bringing you back to Lazarus. In the John 11 account, Lazarus died and was buried in a tomb. Being dead, Lazarus oblivious to all the things we read in the text. He was unaware of the grief and the tears of his friends and family just outside that tomb. He was oblivious to those wailing because of his death. He was oblivious to the very presence of the Lord Jesus who spoke and prayed just outside his tomb. But then the Lord called out His name, "Lazarus, come forth!" It was Jesus who brought him out of death and back to life. Lazarus heard the call of Christ and obeyed, coming out of the tomb. Lazarus had been made alive by the power of the Lord Jesus Christ! That is the surpassing greatness of God's power toward us who believe! And once Lazarus was out, Jesus said, "Unbind him and let him go" (John 11:44). In other words, Jesus not only raised him from the dead, but also set him free from the bondage of the grave. He was raised to live a new life in Jesus. If you know Christ, then the same thing happened to you spiritually. You were dead...but now you are alive in Christ. If you don't know Christ yet, then the same thing can happen to you. Do you hear the call of Christ? Come to Him and He will save you and set you free!

I love Ephesians 2:1 for as depressing as it might seem (and it will get even more depressing when we consider verses 2-3 in a couple weeks), notice it says, "And you were dead..." This condition no longer describes the saints. While these verses do paint a dismal picture of the human race, the good news is that Jesus Christ died to save dead sinners. He entered into death that He might give life to all those who come to Him for salvation. When Christ died on the cross, He died that those who hear His calling would be saved from their sins. Is He calling you? Christ died on the cross so that you might have the spiritual resurrection you so desperately need. For you were "dead" – but now you can and must be born again and live for Christ! No more spiritual zombies – rather, let us be living saints who highly value Christ, for we have seen the exceeding sinfulness of our sin.

Soli Deo Gloria

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