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Ephesians 2:1-10

With Christ

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, ²in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. ³All 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. ⁴But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by *grace you have been saved*. ⁶And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, ⁷in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. ⁸For it is by *grace you have been saved*, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— ⁹not by works, so that no one can boast. ¹⁰For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

As I was preparing today's sermon, I remembered a girl from my first youth group. She was raised in a Lutheran Church. Her parents were great. She was great. One day she said that even though she was a Christian, she always felt so unclean. She knew God had forgiven her. She knew she was washed in the waters of baptism but still she felt dirty. I remember trying so hard to get her out of this mindset, but I did not know what to say.

If I were to speak to her today, I would go about it differently. In fact, I would share with her the words of Ephesians 2: "As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. ³All 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, were by nature objects of wrath.

Death, sinful nature, objects of wrath. Talk about a stiff drink on a Sunday morning. They are words we know all too well. Turn on the television and you hear about celebrities dying, domestic abuse, ponzi schemes, and the like. Paul is right: "All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thought."

These words have hope in them. Notice the tense. "You were dead..." Paul is telling us that we were once dead so that he can tell us that we are alive. Even more, by telling us that we were dead, Paul is telling us that there is nothing inside of us to save us. Works cannot save us. Dead people cannot do good works. Money cannot save us. Dead people cannot use ATM's. Nothing can save us from within us because we are dead.

We need someone to make us alive. Listen to verses 4-5, “But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions —it is by grace you have been saved.” Talk about a reversal. Good Friday turns to Easter morning. Death to life. Sorrow to Joy. God is turning everything on its head.

The obvious question is how does God make us alive? Listen again, “But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. ⁶And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, ⁷in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.

God makes us alive with Christ. When Jesus was crucified, died, buried, and raised, he was not the only one who died and was raised from the dead. We are with Christ. We are so united to Jesus that as sure as he is raised from the dead so too are we. In fact, if someone asks you when you were saved, you could very easily say, “2000 years ago, when Jesus died and rose from the grave.”

Last night, I was at a party with some friends of Jamie. They all know that I am a pastor. It is funny when people are drinking and know that I am a pastor. They bring all their religious questions to me. Last night was no different. A young man was talking to me about sin. He was a Catholic who goes to church on Sunday but knows that he sins during the week and cannot go to confessional enough. He asked me what he should do. I told him that he did not have to go to confessional to be forgiven. Jesus forgave him on the cross. He is with Christ. He is alive and forgiven in him. You was deeply moved.

John Bunyan reminds us, “Sinner, you think that because of your sins I cannot save you. You are wrong. Behold, my Son is by me, and upon him I look (not you), and I will deal with you with the love and affection I have for him.

You were dead, now you are alive with Jesus. It is by grace that you have been saved.

The next question is why does God do this? He does this for many reasons. He does to look good. Listen to verse 7, “In order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.” God’s grace shows his kindness. When he graces us, he gets the glory. In the ages to come, God can say, “There is Claude. Boy he was a really sinner if you know what I mean. He was dead without Christ. But look how he is alive. I saved him.”

Another reason God does this so that no one can boast in themselves. Verses 8-9: “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.” Can you imagine what heaven would be like if we earned it. Then we would go around bragging about ourselves. There would be holy rollers showing how wonderful they are. This would go on for eternity. Talk about terrible. God graces us so that no one can boast.

The final reason God graces us is because we are his masterpiece. Verse 10, “For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do”

There is an old story that happened in England. There was an English pub one evening filled with drinkers and outside there was a raging storm, and the worse the storm got the more people came in for shelter and, of course, they got to drinking and eating. It was wild that night. In the midst of all the melee of people moving around and laughing, there was a waitress who came along with a tray, holding

it high with drinks. Someone did not see her coming and in knocked her over sending the tray flying. It splashes all over a newly painted wall.

The owner of the pub was instantly angry because he just painted the wall and now it looked awful. The crowd became silent waiting to see his reaction. Suddenly from the corner of the tavern or the pub, a man spoke out. He said, "If you will permit me, perhaps I can do something about that." He stepped forward and he opened up a little case that he was carrying with him. Quickly people saw that in the case were a lot of small artist's brushes and paints, and they stood aside and the man went to work on this wall that was so stained with all of this wet that was now there. He began to sketch with charcoal and then paint.

And as the moments went by the crowd grew stiller and stiller, quieter and quieter, and when the man was through forty-five or fifty minutes later, they suddenly saw a wall which had been made ugly with all these blotches, now it was a beautiful thing to behold and the blotches had been turned into something that was absolutely magnificent. And when the man was through, he stepped back and he looked and everyone with him. It was almost as if all gasped together in the beauty of what they were seeing, and then the man who was the artist took a piece of charcoal in the lower left-hand corner, he signed his name, quickly wrapped up the tools of his artistry, and went out the door into the storm. And when the people looked at the name, they suddenly realized they had been watching one of England's greatest artists at work, and they had seen him take something which was ugly to behold and turn it into something absolutely beautiful.

It is by grace that you have been saved.

Conclusion

What would I say to the young girl if I had another chance to talk with her? I would say a few things. I would tell her that such feels of guilt and shame belong to the old Adam. These feelings are the lingering emotions of our old nature. I would also tell her that she is no longer dead but alive. She is united to Christ. When God raised Jesus up, he also raised her up. She is with Jesus. Finally, I would tell her that God loves to brag about her. God loves to say how she is his masterpiece. God loves her.

**In Jesus Name,
Amen**