



Series: Ephesians: Life In Christ

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Speaker: Pastor Spence Shelton, Lead Pastor

Text: Ephesians 2:1-10, “How to Get Saved”

College students - Welcome back!

If you are new around here, we'd love to get to know you.

Freshmen - this is not a dream... you really are on your own.

Which is WHY, listen, which is why we are so big on community around here for college years. For all years, but definitely college years. These are going to be the most formative years of your life and nothing will form you more than the people you surround yourself with. Statistics bear this out - you become basically the average of your 5 closest friends. Another way to say it - your present friends are the future you. SO, make **good** friends. And THAT is why we have Mercy College Ministry. To connect you with other Christians on campus so ya'll can walk with Jesus together. Ok that's all about that - Our college staff is

posted up at both Mercy MPR & MNE today so please introduce yourself and get connected!

Today we are looking at what many consider to be one of the most important passages in the Bible. Here's why - in 10 verses our author, the apostle Paul, announces the gospel message to us. We are going to call this sermon

Ephesians 2.1-10

“How to Get Saved”

Now, I KNOW that the second I say “saved” some of you shuffle in your seat because you conjure an image in your mind of some angry preacher angrily preaching in a tent somewhere about fire and brimstone and he shouts “YOU MUST BE S-AYVVVVVED-EH.” I admit to you I sometimes think of that image.

BUT, while we might think that...we gotta give the imaginary angry tent preacher some credit. Because - when it comes to describing what the bible says God does for you there really is no better word than “saved.”

(Also for what it's worth & since you brought it up, The first real revival in North Carolina where the gospel spread like wildfire - came in the form of tent revivals. Our first 6 months back after covid we met outside in August and put up a big ole tent right



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here in the middle of the driveway. So don't stereotype the tent preacher cause I think I may qualify now.) ANYWAY

For years this is the passage I have used when sharing the Gospel because of how clear it is about our condition as humans, and how celebratory it is as it announces the hope available to us in Jesus. So I am hopeful that as we go through this today, some of you are going to get saved. And we are going to celebrate with you. We say it all the time "we expect God to change a life - today." TODAY. And maybe that's you.

The passage breaks down pretty evenly into 4 parts. **Sin, Grace, Faith, and Works.** Don't worry we'll talk about all of them. And I'm telling you if you are here today just exploring Christianity you couldn't have picked a better weekend. Because we are just walking through the gospel message.

Main idea: God saves sinners through faith in Jesus

1 And you were dead in your trespasses and sins

Ok right out of the gate Paul drops a pretty confrontational word on us doesn't he? Let's consider ideas about sin communicated here that our modern culture heavily denies

YOU were dead in **YOUR** trespasses and sins - Let's be real clear. It's not somebody else who is the problem. Like the renowned cultural philosopher says "It's me, hi, i'm the problem

it's me." It's not the big scary world out there that's the problem. So the idea that you can Christian bubble yourself away from sin...crazy. It's in you & it's in your kids. It's not other people. Or other groups of people. If you are a conservative, liberals and their communism are not the problem. You are. If you are a liberal, conservatives and their racism are not the problem. You are. If that makes you bristle up, stop watching so much cable news and open your bible a little more. Women are not the problem. Men are not the problem. You are the problem. We are not talking about anyone else this morning, we are talking about you. Your sin.

You were DEAD in your trespasses and sins - Ok listen this is big. People often think of sin as actions they do. I lied, I cheated, I stole, I...whatever. And they think they are **good** people who **sometimes do bad** things. But that is just not the case. Because actions come from somewhere. They don't just happen. Listen, and some of you need to write this down **Sin is not just our actions, it's our condition.**

We were dead **IN** our trespasses and sins. Think of it this way, **we are not sinners because we sin. We sin because we are sinners.** And that is so important to understanding the gospel. You are not a good person who needs improving. Who needs to just sin a little less. You are a dead person in need of saving.



And this condition has ALWAYS been in us. Children aren't inherently good. We think they are cute when they are little. But they are actually just helpless tyrants. My sons are pretty close in age. At 3 & 2 the main word in our house was "MINE." Fight after fight over a ball - One would grab it and scowl fiercely at the other and scream from HIS TOES - MINE. That comes from somewhere ya'll, and it's not their *environment* they were raised in. They didn't learn that from watching me & Courtney fight over the last freshly baked cookie yelling "MINE."

The way Tim Keller used to say it - paraphrasing St. Augustine -. He said the only reason parents believe their infant children are cute is because they are helpless. If your 6 month old could do what they wanted to do when you took away their toy, they would decapitate you immediately and mercilessly.

You say - yeah but there's good in people. What about the wife who faithfully cares for her husband as he battles Alzheimer's to his death? But she's not a Christian. You gonna say she's a dead sinner?

Or the couple who fosters 40 kids over 10 years sacrificing themselves time and again. But they are atheists. You going to say they are DEAD sinners?

Well here's what I'll say. I'm not saying what they are doing is wrong. I'm saying you are drastically underestimating the severity of sin. The way my old pastor used to describe it: Imagine there are two terrorists about to bomb a school. And they are eating right before it and one offers the other half of his sandwich. Now, was that a generous act? Well I guess so. But his broader plan renders the good deed insignificant.

Imagine how HOLY God is. He's so holy that Isaiah 64.6 says even our best deeds are like filthy rags. Because he is so holy, our sinful defiance of his rule and reign renders even our best deeds as insignificant in his presence.

We were not bad people needing repair, but dead people needing resurrection. We were not drowning in need of someone to throw us a life raft. We were dead. Jesus didn't come to help you, to improve you, or to fix you. He came to resurrect your dead soul. He came to SAVE you.

Ok everybody feeling good? Great. Well, it gets worse. SO, as it gets worse keep one word we didn't focus on yet in the back of your mind. He's talking to the church and saying You **were** this way. Before you met Jesus this was you. Anyway, back to the bad news:



2 in which you previously walked according to the ways of this world, according to the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit now working in the disobedient.

Who is the ruler of the power of the air? That's Satan. And yes Paul is saying not only were you a dead sinner not just by action but by your very nature...you were in fact a follower of Satan. Which makes sense.

Satan was the one who sought to overthrow God and rule in his place. We do the same thing. Just like Satan, we reject God's authority over us and stand in defiance against his right over our lives. We are in charge. Not him. Right? This was all of us. What did it look like:

3 We too all previously lived among them in our fleshly desires, carrying out the inclinations of our flesh and thoughts,

We carried out the inclinations of our flesh and thoughts. We were MEANT to carry out God's commands. He created mankind to follow him and to flourish as we did so. But we instead chose to do what Disney told us to do, and we followed our hearts. Because we thought following our hearts was true freedom. But it turns out just doing whatever feels right is actually quite terrible for us. And not only does it lead to destructive earthly outcomes, it also lands us in a terrible eternal position:

Walking according to our own authority and rejecting God's authority places us squarely in Satan's camp. In fact:

and we were by nature children under wrath as the others were also.

Apart from Christ, that's who you are. A dead sinful satan follower of your own making who is cut off from God because of your sin. And lest you think I'm just talking to you, 'as others were also.' This is the human condition. We all experience it.

Verses 1-3: Our sin is our problem

Now if you've made it with me down to the pit of sin, I have good news. IF you are aware of your sin and if you agree you need saving from it, I have good news. The opening of verse 4 is the most beautiful and important conjunction in all of scripture. You were by nature children under wrath as the others were also...once you understand THAT...then you are ready for verses 4-7

Verses 4-7: We are saved by God's grace!

4 But God, who is rich in mercy, because of his great love that he had for us, -- Ephesians 2:4



But God. Man this is the greatest news in all the world. When you were dead in your sin. When you were bound for eternity apart from God. When you made a mess of yourself.

BUT God - Every single christian here today has this exact same story. If you had to boil down the hope we christians walk around with two words...here it is. BUT GOD. Every single one of us was heading in one direction. We were lost. BUT GOD. Some of us were addicted to porn for years BUT GOD...Some of us were living in shame and darkness thinking that what we did would FOREVER define us...BUT GOD...Some of you have had an abortion and others of you have encouraged someone close to you to have an abortion and now you feel the full weight of that. And what I want you to hear is that your sin was DEEP. YES. It's awful. Listen to the word of God...BUT GOD. There are people around you who have been where you are and yet they have JOY today. NOT because of what they did but because of the GREAT LOVE OF GOD HE HAD FOR THEM. AND THAT GREAT LOVE of GOD...THE GREATER love of GOD is RICHLY Poured out on CHEATERS and ADDICTS and CRIMINALS and all other manner of sinner that now sits together as brother and sister in Jesus Christ. AND DO YOU KNOW WHY? Verse 5

5 made us alive with Christ even though we were dead in trespasses. You are saved by grace! -- Ephesians 2:5 (CSB)

He made us ALIVE. When we were dead, God stepped in and SAVED US! YOU ARE SAVED BY GRACE!

Is that you? Is that your testimony? How bout we take a second and testify. I know its not everyone in here but if its you church...let the CHURCH TESTIFY YES I HAVE BEEN SAVED! GOD SAVED ME! I want you to clap your hands, shout hallelujah, jump up to your feet whatever you gotta do - we need to just say THIS IS US! BECAUSE HE IS ALIVE WE ARE ALIVE! No frozen chosen up in the church house today. And the good news gets gooder y'all.

He also raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavens in Christ Jesus, -- Ephesians 2:6

See what Paul is saying is because we are UNITED with Christ...we are united with Him in new life. He got out of the grave so we too have new life. But He wasn't just raised from the grave, He was raised again. SEATED at the right hand of God. Remember we talked about that last week? So now Paul is saying that is our future situation. And our FUTURE is so certain He's talking about it as if it's already taken place. IT has ALREADY been secured, we are just not yet sitting there with him. But positionally we are citizens of eternal glory. WHOA. WHY WOULD GOD DO THAT FOR US?



7 so that in the coming ages he might display the immeasurable riches of his grace through his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. -- Ephesians 2:7

God did this to us so that we can be trophies of His grace to others. The riches of His grace are immeasurable and they are on display right here in the church. For all to see for all time. Like the people in this age are to somehow SEE, because it's on display in us, they are to SEE the grace of God. Bunch of messed up sinners from all walks of life standing together redeemed and full of hope and joy and purpose greater than any job or ivy league education or fame could ever give. Why? So God can get glory in this age and then in the age to come. Gives me such hope for the church. Like He will just keep displaying His grace in Jesus in the church. He's got all of us...but then there are stories that are not written yet. That are going to be trophies of grace too.

Like somewhere on UNCC or QUEENS or WINGATE or at BUTLER HIGH or PROVIDENCE or AUDREY KELL or EAST MECK or SOUTH MECK or MYERS PARK is a young man or young woman running hard after their sin. BUT GOD. BUT GOD. BUT GOD. He's not out of mercy. He's got more of it. He's got all you need and more! And He's calling YOU today He's calling your friend tomorrow. And it's because HE LOVES YOU AND HE WANTS THE WORLD TO SEE HOW GRACIOUS HE IS BY WHAT HE DOES IN YOUR LIFE.

And the coming ages means not just in our lives, but in all of time to come. All the way until we are gathered together in eternity with him. Even in that end of all things we will be there so that other saints and the angels themselves will marvel at the grace of God when they look at us. It's pretty awesome to consider.

Our sin is our problem, yet we are saved by God's grace because of His rich love He has for us. Leads us to verses 8-9. How God saves us.

8 For you are saved by grace through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is God's gift — 9 not from works, so that no one can boast. -- Ephesians 2:8-9

We are saved by grace *through* faith. And even our faith is a gift given, not a work. Sometimes we can make faith a work. Because it is something within our control. But even our faith is God's gift to us.

So let's make sure we understand the relationship between **God's** grace and **our** faith.

Verses 8 - 9: We receive salvation from sin through faith

Since it's so hot right now we'll use a refreshing example. How many of you have water skied before? Ok I never have. So you will understand this and the rest of us have just seen hilarious



videos. I have gone tubing. Which is where you sit on an inflatable tube and get dragged behind the boat. But back to water skiing. To water ski you must be pulled behind the boat at a fast enough speed that it keeps you on top of the water. So question: what is it that pulls me? Is it the rope or the boat? Well, the rope you are holding onto is the instrumental cause of your speed. The rope has NO power on its own. The rope transfers the power of the boat to you. The REAL reason you are moving forward is the boat.

So it is by grace...through faith...that you are saved. God's grace is the boat - the reason you are saved. God's grace makes you a Christian, not faith. But it is through faith you are saved. Faith is the rope, the instrument *through which* you experience the saving grace of God.

And the great news is - even faith is a gift from God. Some of you wish you had strong faith. Maybe there are men or women you look up to and say I wish I had faith like you, I just don't. And it's probably not intentional but you see faith as a work. When those very same people will tell you, It's not me...i've just been holding on to this rope for a little longer than you. And it's here for you too.

And my prayer, OUR prayer, for you today is that you will grab onto the rope. You don't need to clean yourself up. That's a work. You don't need to make amends with the people you

hurt. That's a work. Listen to me **we don't work FOR our salvation, we work from it.**

Step 1 is simply receiving the gift of salvation God offers you in Christ. You are a sinner who cannot save himself or herself. But you can be saved by believing that though you were dead in your trespasses and sins...God stepped in. But God. He stepped in and sent his son Jesus to the cross to die a sinner's death. A traitor's death. It's the death you and I deserved for our sin. Jesus went to the cross instead of us. That was him paying the debt we owed. His death was God's grace. That's the boat going. The power of God. And then what we've read today is God raised Him. Meaning we aren't just saved from death, but we are given a NEW LIFE. And not just new life here where the power of God (see last week) the power of God is working in us. We also have ETERNAL life He has seated us in.

And He calls us to receive it. And THEN...when we receive it. After salvation, not before it but after it...comes Ephesians 2:10. Look at this.

10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared ahead of time for us to do. -- Ephesians 2:10

God calls you His workmanship. I'm not a great worker with my hands. I'm still aspiring 'cause I love a good woodworking shop.



The sound of a saw, the smell of fresh cut wood. I'm even good with sawdust. Just nature's glitter. But there are a handful of guys here at Mercy that can create pretty remarkable stuff from a block of wood. And it's awesome to see them do it.

See God is the master craftsman. And He's saying He has created you...in Christ Jesus...for Good works. You understand before the beginning of time...we covered that the first two weeks of this series. That was chapter 1. Before the beginning of time - He created you for good works AND...here's how awesome God is...He has set everything in motion for you to carry out those good works.

What I'm trying to get you to see is that your life up to this point is not an accident. God made you. And in Christ you are redeemed by Him and then you are going to go out into the world with a purpose - to be a display of His grace as you do what he made you to do.

This should cause us to have the following outlook on life

If I'm God's workmanship I'm hopeful about my future: - God isn't a bad craftsman. He's the master. You have such infinite value and worth. And not only that, He has made you to display His glory in a unique way that only you can. So your question you are asking is - how do you want to get glory in my life God? That's the question for BIG things like career choices. Not how

can I make the most money. It won't satisfy because you weren't CRAFTED to make the most money. You were crafted to give God glory. Otherwise, rich would equal happy. But it doesn't.

You were created for good works though. You have a whole life ahead of you where God has created you to display his glory in one of a kind awesome ways. Some of you are going to go to the top of your field and as you go, give God glory so that those around you will know His grace. Because nothing else matters at the end of your life or theirs. Some of you are going to be called into something way harder - called into your home as a stay at home mom. Hardest job on earth. I think about my wife and the years she spent where she was called MOM way more than she was called Courtney. And if you think MONEY EARNING = Good Work then you'd snub your nose at a stay at home mom. But if you think of bringing God glory as your created purpose...as your good work...well then you see real quick that a stay at home mom is an eternity changing God glorifying work. So whether you win NBA championship trophies or mom of the year mugs...if you do it for the GLORY OF GOD in Jesus - you will find deeper fulfillment than you will in anything else. And when you age out of sports, or your kids leave home...you won't have an identity crisis. Because your identity was always in giving God glory wherever he put you.



If we are God's workmanship, I'm hopeful for the lost around me

Listen, the great news of the gospel is God saves sinners right? Well listen...what you've heard today is that YOU are not a savior. So, the burden is off of you. In Christ You are a wonderful display of God's grace. So take some refuge in that. And take a lot of confidence that God is not done saving people. There are lost people who God is going to save and they are all around you. Your role is to simply tell them what God has done in your life. And if you understand the gospel of what you were saved FROM, how could you not? How could we not? Our college ministry has a goal to share the gospel 4000 times over the first 10 days they are on campus. They don't have a goal to save people. Because they can't. But they can tell people about the God who saved them!

Closing story: Todd Way & Ben Hedrick.

Don't wait til tomorrow to share the gospel and don't wait til tomorrow to receive the gospel.



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