

Ephesians 2.1-10 Sermon / WCC / 10.25.20

Introduction

- † **[1: Title]** Good morning. Please join me in a brief prayer...
- † How many of you regularly check the news? What is the worst news you ever heard in a newscast or read in a news article? Most of what we call news is bad news, but today we will hear news worse than anything I have ever seen on tv or the web.
- Now, shift gears. What is the best news you have ever received personally about your life? How did you feel when you first learned that good news? Let's hope you feel the same way about the good news we will discuss today, because it is the best news ever.
- † I am so glad to see you here! We are following the tradition of the early church in gathering together on Sundays to celebrate Christ's resurrection!
- We'll talk about implications of the crucifixion and resurrection today. You might want to open your Bible to Ephesians 2. I will be using the ESV, but you can follow along in whatever translation you prefer.
 - You also can grab the handout, which you should have received with your bulletin. The handout helps you to think about the concepts during the week, to have more of an impact on your life.
 - Are you ready? You're going to get some bad news and you have to be patient; the bad news will take about ten minutes; don't get up and leave! you want to wait for the good news! Are you ready? Here we go...

[2: 2.1-2a] Ephesians 2.1-2a: And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked...

- † Ok, stop... You were born dead, did you know that? You were born spiritually dead. You were born with a corruption in your nature. Everyone is.
- God created people in his own image, to reflect his character and represent him here on Earth. But when the first people, Adam and Eve, chose to sin, when they chose to walk away from God and do something that was against God's will, they experienced a corruption in their capacity to reflect God's image, a corruption in their human nature, and that corruption is passed down from generation to generation. You got it from your parents and if you had children then you passed it on to them. We call this "inherited sin."
 - One result of this corruption is that we are from the moment of conception spiritually dead. As a species we have lost the eternal spark of life, because we were separated from God by our corruption. So Paul notes here that the Ephesians were spiritually dead; we will see in a moment that he is speaking this about all of us.
- † You were spiritually dead *and* mired in your sins, your trespasses or transgressions against God.
- Sin is any action, any speech, even any thought, it is anything that goes against God's character or God's will. All your life, you have repeatedly gone against God's character and his will! Every time you told a white lie, every time you spoke harshly to someone, with every lustful thought,

you allowed your behavior to be guided by the corruption of your nature rather than by what remains of God's image in you.

- So you were spiritually dead and you were mired in sin against God. That's bad news, right?

[3: 2.1-2] Let's start again. **Ephesians 2.1-2: And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience...**

† Because you were spiritually dead, you chose to sin, you chose to turn away from God, from his revelation, from his will, from his way of life, and you followed the world's path. The world, by which we mean our culture, is corrupt too. Why? Because it is shaped by people who are corrupted in nature and thus spiritually dead and mired in sin!

- So you were spiritually dead, you were mired in sin, as you became a creature of your culture, following the ways of the world.

† **[4: Satan]** And it gets worse: by doing this, you were choosing to walk away from Christ to follow Satan! Satan is the fallen angel, the demon, who seized control of the Earth from Adam and Eve, who lured them into sin and thus corruption, who continues to work evil and lead people astray today. He is the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who is energizing those who are disobedient to God, those who reject Christ and relish sin.

- So you were spiritually dead, you were mired in sin walking away from God, thus you were choosing the ways of the world instead of the ways of God, and thus – though you might not have known this – you were following Satan instead of following Christ or walking with God.

[5: 2.1-3] I'll read this once more, to the end of this dreary sentence. **Ephesians 2.1-3: And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following 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 in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.**

† How many of us had this problem, this spiritual death, this walk of sin, this turning away from God to walk with Satan in our corruption? How many? All of us, every one of us. This is the apostle Paul writing, he says he too, along with all the other apostles, every person ever born had this problem.

- We all were giving in to our flesh, living by emotion, by desire, instead of by God's revelation. If it felt good, we not only would do it, we would justify it in our minds as being right. Look out for number one, take what you can get, pile up wealth, manipulate to get your way, be powerful by being forceful and angry, seek revenge to teach them a lesson, sleep around, watch porn, get drunk or high, lie when it is convenient, like others for what they can do for you... This is how people live when they are spiritually dead, mired in sinfulness, following what is normal in the corrupted culture of the world, being secretly influenced by Satan and his demons.

† **[6: wrath]** And what is the result of all this? We were children of wrath. This means we all were deserving of God's wrath, deserving of God's judgment. We no longer were functioning as his image bearers. In Adam, we all walked away from God, and because of Adam's sin, we all were born with corruption in our character, our nature, and then we all chose to sin on our own, to walk away from God, to spurn God and his ways, to pursue our lusts, our jealousy and anger, the ways of the world,

the path of Satan. So we deserve God's wrath, we deserve his judgment, we deserve to be separated from him, not only now, but forever, which means we deserve to be condemned to Hell.

- We don't like to think about that. We like to think we are relatively good people. Here we all are in church. I have never murdered anyone; I have not cheated on my wife; I have never taken illegal drugs in my whole life! And now I am a pastor, every day trying to do God's work, to know him and obey him and serve him. I am a good person!
- Ah, but did I look at that naked woman in the movie? Did I snap at my wife when she frustrated me? Did I get angry when someone let me down? Did I wish God would send a lightning bolt upon my noisy neighbor or my bothersome coworker? Oh, many times. Did I ever slack off at work or get tipsy on a Friday night or choose to watch tv instead of serve in the church one week? Have I neglected my lost neighbor, have I neglected my quiet time devotions with God?
- Guess what, I sinned, I revealed my corruption, I chose to walk the path of Satan instead of with Christ, I deserve God's wrath, I deserve to be condemned to Hell, and so do you, so does everyone. That's the bad news. . . Deep breath. Now let's hear the good news!

[7: 2.4-5a] Ephesians 2.4-5a: But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses...

- † Oh, that's a good beginning, God being rich in mercy! Mercy means you do not get what you deserve. The bad news is you deserve eternal separation from God, you deserve God's wrath, you deserve condemnation to Hell, but God being rich in mercy... God will not give you what you deserve! Oh we praise and thank you God!
 - God being rich in mercy and because of his great love with which he loved us... Here is another reason to cling to hope. You were spiritually dead, mired in sin, following the corrupted ways of your flesh, the world, and Satan, and yet God loved you! In that moment! God loved you with his great love, a love that is infinite, unconditional, sacrificial, and unwavering. This is good!

[8: 2.4-5] Let's read that again. Ephesians 2.4-5: But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ-- by grace you have been saved...

- † Hallelujah! Before we talk about grace, let me clarify who this Christ is, because there is confusion about this in our society and even in many churches today.
 - We believe there is one true God, but that God has revealed himself as three individuals – God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit – each unique in personhood and activity, but so unified in essence, character, and will that they are one God; each is fully God, yet all three are one God. This is what we mean when we talk about the Trinity or the triune nature of God. It doesn't make a lot of sense to our finite brains, but it is no surprise that God is beyond our understanding!
 - Now, God the Son, also called the Son of God, came to earth and was born as the baby Jesus, so Jesus was fully God and fully human. This was to fulfill prophetic promises God made to Adam and Eve, Abraham, Moses, David, and all Israel, that a savior would come called the Messiah, which means "anointed one." "Christ" comes from the Greek word that refers to this Messiah.

- So Jesus is the Christ, which means he is the savior God promised would come. He came and stared down sin, evil, and even death, by living a perfectly pure and sinless life, then dying for us, taking God the Father's wrath for us, then rising victoriously from the grave on the third day.

† **[9: grace]** We have talked about why we need to be saved, why we need a savior, now let's talk about how and why it happens. Paul says God shows us grace. Mercy is to not receive what you do deserve, grace is to receive what you do not deserve. We do not get God's wrath, we get his love; we do not get God's judgement, we get his forgiveness; we do not get condemned to eternal spiritual death, we get made spiritually alive with Christ, it is by grace we are saved!

- Grace is unmerited favor. That means you do not deserve it, you cannot earn it, you are never going to be worthy of it. It is by grace – it is by God's gift – that you are saved from wrath and into new spiritual life, that you are made spiritually alive with Christ.
- You were spiritually dead, but now you are spiritually alive, born again by the Holy Spirit! You are saved from the penalty of sin, so you can have an intimate relationship with God right now, and then go to be with him in Heaven after physical death.

[10: 2.4-7] Let me read this good news one more time! **Ephesians 2.4-7: But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ-- by grace you have been saved-- and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.**

† When God saved you by grace, as a gift, he made you spiritually alive, and he raised you up with Christ, that is you share in the victory of Christ's resurrection: you are crucified with Christ with regard to sin, but you are resurrected to new spiritual life with Christ, to a life of victory over sin and death and evil.

- And this is with Christ, it is not merely that you are reborn to spiritual life – as great as that is! – it is not merely that you will experience healing of your corrupted nature, renewal of your mind, transformation of your character – you will have all that, but there is more! – it also is that you are empowered by Christ, united with him, indwelt by the Holy Spirit he sent to believers in this New Covenant era.
- So you are free both from the penalty of sin and from the power of sin, so now you can walk with Christ in freedom, freedom from addiction, freedom from bad habits, freedom from succumbing to temptation; you now are empowered to walk with God, to reflect his character, to represent him, as he created people to do. How awesome is that?!

† And God seated you with Christ in Heaven.

- Physically, Christ was resurrected from the dead, and after forty days of further ministry, he ascended to Heaven to sit at the right hand of God the Father.
- Spiritually, because you are united with Christ, you have been given new life from the dead and you have been granted a place in Heaven with Christ. Elsewhere, the Bible says believers are citizens of Heaven, adopted sons of God, with a guaranteed inheritance in Heaven. If you have put your faith in Jesus, that's you!

- † **[11: glory]** Many people memorize this passage because it is about grace, but note there is purpose here as well. Here we see the first of two reasons why God saves us: to show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. We are saved for God's glory.
- Sometimes we struggle with the idea of God saving us. We want to think we had a part in it. Some churches teach you have to do something to be saved; others that God offers grace to everyone and then we chose God while others didn't. Do you see the problem? By those theories, we would be saved because we were good enough to do something or good enough to choose God, which is not the message of this text nor of the Bible as a whole.
 - No, we were depraved, we were spiritually dead, choosing to sin, deserving of God's wrath, and at that lowest point in our existence, God loved us and chose to save us, chose to show us mercy, chose to give us grace. The glory is all his, he saved his enemies, he adopted those who killed his son, he showed purity of love as well as of character. We had nothing to do with it.
 - Sometimes we also struggle with God not saving everyone. But that's the wrong perspective. We all deserve condemnation. We have seen that today. We all share the guilt of the human race failing to represent God and reflect his character, we all are corrupted, we all choose to sin against God. The miracle is that God chooses to save any of us! But in his mercy and love and grace, he does, to demonstrate the surpassing wealth of his grace, for his glory.

[12: 2.8-9] Ephesians 2.8-9: For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

- † This reminds me of the mantra we have received from the Reformation: we are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. We do not add to the gospel, for this is God's revelation!
- Walking in sin, we have dug ourselves a pit of spiritual death, physical death, emotional depravity, intellectual depravity, a pit in which we cannot help but give in to our desires, we cannot help but sin, we cannot get out. But God by grace offers us a miraculous way out, a deliverance from the penalty for sin, deliverance from the power of sin, deliverance into new spiritual life, deliverance into relationship with him. This is salvation! It is all a gift, by grace.
 - The sign of receiving that grace is that you have faith. You believe in who Jesus is as both the divine Son of God and the human Messiah-savior known as Christ. You believe in what Jesus accomplished for you in his crucifixion and resurrection. That is, you admit you need the grace, the salvation, God offers; and you believe that this was accomplished when Jesus paid the penalty for your sins on the cross – he not only physically died for you, he spiritually took on the full burden of all God's wrath that you deserved, of all God's punishment and condemnation that you deserved – so that you could be saved.
 - When you put your faith in Jesus in this way, God the Father takes Christ's absolute righteousness and accounts it to you, he declares you to be legally righteous forever, and thus you are free from the penalty of your sin; and the Holy Spirit comes to indwell you, to baptize you which means to identify you with Christ, and to empower you through spiritual rebirth and ongoing renewal and transformation, so that you also can begin to live righteously in relationship with God.
 - This all is a gift from God, it depends on God's mercy and grace and love and it depends on the righteousness and sacrifice of Christ, it does not depend at all on you or your own works. That means you cannot boast about it, because you had nothing to do with it. It also means you cannot lose it, because it is not dependent on you or what you do. That's more good news.

[13: 2.10] Last Verse: **Ephesians 2.10: For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.**

- † This is the second reason God saved us, and it is the same reason for which he created us: we are to represent him here and reflect his character, and thereby do the works he prepared for us to do. We were created and saved as an act of grace, but there was purpose in this: to bring God glory and to create for him a representative image-bearing people.
 - So we must learn how to live God's way, how to have the character of Christ, how to do the work of Christ. This is not just about avoiding the fleshly things, it also is about doing the good works God prepared for us. If you are still breathing, God has something for you to do.
 - When LeeAnn's grandmother became a widow, she just wanted to die and go to Heaven, to be with Jesus and her husband. So we told her, if she was still breathing, God had something for her to do. So she began to offer a lot of constructive criticism about my preaching! I'm not sure there was a connection in her mind, but perhaps this was what God had for her to do!

Conclusion

- † **[14: implications]** Before we close, let's consider some implications of all this.
 - First, you should avoid feelings of self-righteousness and avoid judging others. You are just as guilty, corrupted, and sinful as the rest of us! You are as desperately in need of grace and a savior as the rest of us. And your salvation has nothing to do with how good you are or how much good you do. It is only by the grace of God if you are not among the lost, headed to Hell.
 - On the other hand, you should feel confident, not in yourself, but in God's deliverance. God's love is so great that he loved you at your worst, when you were his enemy. God's mercy is so great that Christ took your punishment for you. God's grace is so great that he offers you every blessing as an unmerited gift. Be assured that your salvation depends on the character of God, not your own. You will mess up every day for the rest of your life, but that will never change God's love for you, nor the salvation he has given you.
 - Yes, you will mess up. But you should be trying not to, right? God created you and saved you for a purpose, that you would learn to walk in his light, reflecting his character and representing him. So make your relationship with God the number one priority in your life. Immerse yourself in scripture and prayer, worship God daily, find ways to participate in his ministry. Even if you are physically incapacitated, you can pray for fruitfulness in this ministry, for each other, and for your lost neighbors. You could even follow LeeAnn's grandmother's example, telling me how I could improve my sermons!
- † **[15: title]** We celebrate the truth of Christ's resurrection every Sunday. Jesus died for us, but he came back to life, proving his victory over death, sin, and evil, proving his identity as the Son of God and savior, proving God the Father approved of his sacrifice, proving that we too are resurrected spiritually back to life now by grace through faith in him, and that we will be resurrected physically back to life on a renewed earth with Christ as our king in the end.
 - If you have never put your faith in Jesus, today is the day! Just sit quietly for a moment and ask yourself whether you believe what you have heard today. If you do, then celebrate with us, because your belief is the sign that you received God's grace and mercy, and now are saved!

- If you came to faith before, celebrate again! We all would benefit from dwelling more on the gospel, reflecting regularly on grace. What a gift you have, will you rejoice? Will you now live like someone given life, given freedom, given adoption into God's family and into God's love?
- If you are struggling with sin, you are not alone; we all have been there, many of us still are. Let us come alongside you; we will not judge you, we want to help you. Let today mark your victory in Christ! You have been set free, so it is time to stop living like a slave to sin. Choose today to walk in God's light, not the shadows; to walk with God, not with the flesh; to follow Christ, not Satan; to live by faith and obedience to God's revelation, as his man, his woman, his workmanship.

† When I was growing up, we often sang the Hallelujah Chorus. Hallelujah means praise Yahweh; that is, praise God. That's why we are here.

- We praise the one true God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – and we praise them and thank them all the more because even though we deserved wrath, God showed us mercy, love, and grace, such that the Son came to die for us.
- We praise God because we know that Christ rose from that grave on the third day, and so we can have life, we can crawl out of the pit, we can live in freedom in relationship with God, through putting our faith in God's promise which we call the gospel, the promise of who Jesus is and what he did for us. That's why we celebrate this day.
- Let's pray...