



ephesians

a church becoming

Sunday, October 6, 2024

Ephesians 1:1-10

I remember being in my early teenage years and experiencing some of my friends at school, and even at church, start going down the path of exploring the things of the world. Now these were kids that were for the most part, a part of Christian families and I remember having a vivid prayer one night before I went to bed. I remember thinking of these kids and comparing them to my life and my prayer was something along the lines of, 'God, I feel that I might start going in that direction and I know I shouldn't, but I feel like I might, but just hold me close and don't let me go too far.'

And what was really interesting about that whole scenario was that even at that young age, I was experience the tension between the world and the kingdom. I was learning about things like temptation, obedience, self-sacrifice and discipline. I was learning the difference between justification and sanctification in a very real way.

You see, for many people that accept Jesus Christ as their Saviour, there is this understanding that this is a one and done type of moment. That upon confessing, Jesus Christ as Saviour, then that's it, and all of a sudden it puts us on easy street. But this is not the case. Upon accepting Jesus Christ as Saviour, this puts us into His family, and now the work of change and transformation really begins. And if I can be completely honest, this work of change and transformation, or as we like to refer to it, sanctification, is a lifelong process. Paul has been reminding us that as we grow in relationship with Jesus Christ, He continues to reveal himself to us in greater and deeper ways, as He gives us the wisdom to live accordingly. For many of us here today we would likely confess that in our growth journey with the Lord we may not actually be where we want to be. But perhaps the reminder - as we step into chapter 2 - this morning is that although we're not where we want to be, we are also not where we used to be. And this is exactly what Paul is now reminding the church in Ephesus of. And he starts off this section by telling them just how bad it really used to be!

Ephesians 2:1-10

'And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, 2 in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, 3 among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.

4 But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, 5 even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), 6 and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 9 not of works, lest anyone should boast. 10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.'

'We're not where we want to be, but thank God we're not where we used to be.'

For me, this is the overwhelming theme of the first four verses in chapter two. And what Paul is doing here is just that - he's reminding the Ephesians just how bad it was without Christ before reminding them just how good it is in Christ. And it's interesting to note that Paul doesn't just start off his message by delving into the goodness of God but instead he takes us into our past. I don't think there's anyone in the room today or online that can read these first four verses and not be taken back to moments in our past. For some of us this can be hard as it can conjure up memories of old wounds, past mistakes, or painful experiences. But Paul's intent isn't to bring up our past to shame us - it's to help us fully appreciate the transformation that has taken place through Christ. You see, sometimes human nature can get stuck in the mundane, day to day of the every day and being reminded of the past actually helps us to remember just how good the present/future really is.

Example: Mevo glove.

So, by remembering the past it allows me to bring a deeply personal connection to His goodness in the present. By remembering where we once were - stuck in hopelessness and despair - we can grasp more fully the goodness of God in our present. His goodness is no longer just an abstract truth or distant reality; it's deeply personal. It's happened to me. I've experienced it and will continue to experience it as long as I'm on this earth.

This is why I wear a cross around my neck. Not because it's cool, but because it's deeply meaningful.

I often reach down and hold it and as I rub my thumbnail along the back, I'm reminded of what Jesus did for me - the deep dark pit of despair and hopelessness that He rescued me from. And while I may not be where I want to be, I'm no longer where I used to be.

Paul seems to be urging us to remember how bleak things were so we can fully appreciate the hope we live in now. It's not about focusing on the negative, but about letting the radical contrast between the two make us more grateful and deepen our understanding of grace. This reflection helps us avoid taking for granted the incredible new life we've been given in Christ.

And look how glorious that life really and truly is!!!

Paul now starts his response to humanity's previous despair with two simple yet profound words:

'But God...'

I find it interesting to note that Paul does not say, 'And God...' This might sound like I'm splitting hairs, but this is actually quite significant because 'But God...' doesn't just mark a break in the story - it defies both the natural progression and the expectation of judgment here. Follow my thinking here: Paul has just taken four full verses to go into great detail on just how wicked and evil humanity is towards God and so the natural progression of this section would be for God - who is righteous, holy and just - to now pronounce His wrath and judgment upon wicked humanity. Given our state of being dead in sin and deserving of God's wrath, judgment would have been entirely expected and just. However, when Paul writes 'But God,' it signals a radical shift from the expected judgment to now the unexpected mercy and grace. And instead of receiving the punishment we deserved, God showed us His great and powerful love.

So Paul now takes these next 7 verses to go into great detail about God's shocking and decisive response to humanity here. And although there is a lot going on in this section it is crucial that we understand that ultimately everything that Paul is saying here can be boiled down to one very basic yet profound focal point.

I am a bit of a nerd when it comes to stuff like this so bear with me because I think this next part is really, really fascinating. We don't often talk about the literary structure of Paul's letters, but we did earlier on in the series when it came to his famous run-on sentence of 208 Greek words in Chapter 1. Paul was just so enthusiastic that punctuation just flew out the door on that one. Well, we are smack dab in the middle of another epic run for Paul. This section is now a 124 word, run-on sen-

tence in the Greek in which Paul is all over the map! Now, if you study, literature and writing in the English, you would naturally come across the teaching of a simple sentence structure. Basic sentence structure always includes a subject, verb and object. You can't make a sentence without these three basics. And no matter how many descriptors and fillers you place in that sentence, the basic subject, verb and object remain the point. For example, take this sentence: 'The boy kicked the ball.' Here, we have a subject (the boy), a verb (kicked), and an object (the ball). No matter how much extra detail we add, like 'The young boy with the red shirt kicked the ball with all his strength on the soccer field,' the basic structure and focal point remains the same - subject, verb, and object. That's what drives the meaning of the sentence.

Now, bringing this back to our passage from vs 4-10, despite all the descriptors, additional clauses, and even Paul's tendency toward run-on sentences, the essence of this passage boils down to this same basic sentence structure which we can clearly see in vs. 4.

Ephesians 2:4

'But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us...'

This is the focal point of the whole section. God is the subject, love is the verb and we are the object.

God. Loves. Us.

God. Loves. You.

Everything in this next section hinges on these three words. In your darkest sin, God loved you. In your furthest disobedience, God loved you. In your deliberate rebellion and obstinacy, God so loved you.

John 3:16

'For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.'

Every other detail, whether it's about grace, mercy, or being raised to new life in Christ, flows now from this central point that God loves us - and His love is expressed through these transformative actions.

Because of His great love - He is rich in mercy towards us

Because of His great love - He showed grace towards us

Because of His great love - He made us alive in Christ

Because of His great love - He raised us up

Because of His great love - He seated us together in Christ.

And Because of His great love - He saved us by Grace, through Faith and that not of yourselves, but it is the gift of God.

Now, because of His great love for us, Paul now mentions three specific truths that help to bring clarification:

God - made us alive together with Christ

God - raised us up together

God - made us sit together in the heavenly places, in Christ

But notice that when Paul writes these phrases in verses 5 & 6, he does not talk about them in the future tense - that these are things that will come. Notice that he talks about all three as actions that happened in the past-tense.

This is key.

Because, if you're paying close attention, then this should spark a memory from Chapter 1 where we first encountered these same three actions. In that chapter, Paul attributed these actions to Jesus: God made Jesus alive, God raised Jesus up and God sat Jesus on the throne. But now in chapter 2, Paul is using these same three actions and applying them to us.

There's two things happening here:

The first is that Paul is drawing a correlation to what God did for Jesus over 2000 years ago, now to us. Saying that everything that happened in that moment, can now be applied to us as well. Why? Because as Paul has already said in Chapter 1, even though the church is in Ephesus - or Stoney Creek - really, as Christians, our home is IN Christ. And because we are in Christ, and God calls us family and co-heirs with Christ, then these three things can also be applied to our lives. Just as Christ was made alive, we too have been made alive together with Him. Just as Christ was raised from death, we too have been raised from bondage to freedom. And just as Christ is seated in heavenly places, we are seated with Him in the heavenly realms.

But he does not say this action is something to anticipate in the future. He uses the past-tense

here instead. Why? Because it's Paul's way of emphasizing the completeness and finality of what Jesus accomplished:

At the cross.

Our new life, our raised position, and our place with Christ are already secured. We've already been given new life, and we've already been seated in a place of authority and privilege with Christ in the heavenly realms. And when we really and truly grasp the depth of God's love for us through our union with Christ this should completely transform the way we live because we don't need to be looking for victory as if it's something that's going to happen, folks, we're already living in victory! It's the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross.

It's already been done. It is finished.

And the most amazing thing is that this act alone grants us a new identity. We are no longer spiritually dead and slaves to sin, but we are alive in Christ, seated with Him, and called now - as Paul says - to live out the good works that God has prepared for us.

Do you perhaps see now why Paul said all of this stuff about God's love for us and our union with Christ before talking about the role of good works in the life of a Christian? It's because he's desperately trying to get them to understand that while good works have a purpose, and we're called to live out those good works to bring glory to Christ, they have nothing to do with earning our salvation. Paul wants the Ephesians - and us - to understand that we are not saved by our works, but by the finished work of Jesus on the cross. The only work that has been done for our salvation is His work, not ours.

Our good works therefore serve as a heart-felt response to the love, mercy, and grace we've already received. God has prepared these good works for us to walk in, not as a way to earn His favour, but as a natural outflow of our transformed lives in Christ. We're not working to earn anything; we're living out of the reality of what has already been accomplished for us. We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works - because we are saved, not in order to be saved. Therefore, the good works we do are a reflection of the new life we've been given - not a requirement to receive it. Everything we are and everything we do flows from the finished work of Christ.

It is finished.

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