

## Ephesians 2 v1-10    6<sup>th</sup> March 2022

Good morning. We are in Ephesians 2 if you want to follow.

We have come across the city of Ephesus before. When we looked at the 7 churches in Revelation it was the first on the list. One of the wonders of the ancient world was here. The great temple of Artemis, (Greek name for the Roman goddess Diana.) The temple stood on 100 pillars and towered above the city.

It's to such a place Paul writes this letter to a small community of believers. They are probably meeting in the home of whoever has the biggest house. The majority of them are Gentile believers and the rest are from a Jewish background. As we saw in previous weeks, both are now one in Christ Jesus.

Ephesians is one of the 4 letters commonly known as the prison epistles. The others, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon. Paul is a prisoner of the mad emperor Nero. (You remember in Acts he appealed to Caesar.) In a few short years he and Peter, will both lose their lives at the whim of this madman.

In Ephesians he mentions a few times where he is. In chapter 3v1 '**I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus** and 4 v1 '**as a prisoner for serving the Lord**' and 6v20 '**I am in chains now, still preaching this message as God's ambassador.**'

He is in chains and yet we've just read that amazing passage in Ephesians. (v.4 But God is so rich in mercy and he loved us so much) .When you read Philippians you need to pinch yourself. It's all about joy and rejoicing in the Lord. (x12 in 4 short chapters). Colossians is also upbeat and in Philemon (one of the greatest short stories you'll ever read) Paul is concerned about bringing Onesimus the runaway slave into a right relationship with his master Philemon. He sends him back, from Rome to Colossae. This was all to his own cost as Onesimus had become a great friend and help to Paul since he had become a believer.

He used to be teaching and preaching all over the then known world, but now he's in jail. He even says **he has learned to be content.** (Phil 4v11) How does Paul do it? The answer I think is to be found in the passage we read this morning. We have here one of the greatest before and after pictures of what God has done for us who believe in him. The truth is Paul will never ever forget what God has done for him and he wants to help us to do the same.

Let's have a look at this before and after picture God has for us. The before part is in **v.1-3 Our Spiritual Death.**

If you are thinking that doesn't sound good you are right. In fact Ray C. Stedman said, 'Here in these 3 verses is a revelation of a truth so difficult for us to receive that we immediately tend to discount it and water it down.'

We'll have to be on the lookout for that. Paul summarizes our human condition in these 3 verses and he doesn't hold back. If you want to read the full version in Romans, the first 3 chapters.

**'Once you were dead because of your disobedience and your many sins.'** Paul points out we are all in this together. The **you** is plural referring to the Gentiles who made up the majority of this church. Then in v.3 he adds '**All of us**' that is the Jewish members including himself.

Obviously not physical death as they like us were getting on with their lives. No this is spiritual death. What does spiritual death look like? We have to go back to Genesis 2v16 '**You may freely eat the fruit of every tree in the garden-except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If you eat its fruit you are sure to die.**'

We know the story well. In the first 2 chapters it has been God's voice (and God said) and then the man. He can't contain his delight at the arrival of Eve. But at the start of chapter 3 another voice is heard. A subtle, cynical voice and he takes the opposite view. '**You won't die.**'

As soon as the man and the woman act on this new message, (they were free to act) their eyes are opened and they feel shame. They try to cover up and they hide from God. This is spiritual death. Their spirit no longer has connection with God. They are doing their own thing, sorting out their own problems. Yet God graciously still turns up in the cool of the day.

They play the blame game. Adam gets 2 for the price of one. He blames Eve and God.

**'It was the woman you gave me who gave me the fruit'** Gen 3v12 (not so long ago he was beside himself at God bringing the woman to him.)

Eve blames the serpent and the serpent doesn't have a leg to stand on!

This ties up with Romans 5v12. **'When Adam sinned, sin entered the world. Adam's sin brought death, so death spread to everyone, for everyone sinned.'**

As well as being dead because of our disobedience and many sins, v.2 tells us we are just living like the rest of the world, going downstream and obeying an unseen commander. He is the spirit at work in the hearts of those who refuse to obey God.

Even though we may not be aware of it, there is someone behind the scenes, pulling the strings like a grand puppet master. The satan, the accuser, the destroyer. So many names and so many guises and disguises.

Behind the world powers, the warmakers, the human traffickers, and those of us who refuse to obey God is this commander, the devil. Even worse in v.3 **'we were subject to God's anger, just like everyone else.'**

Now where we can water down or discount this message as Ray Stedman pointed out is when we have a figure like the mad emperor Nero or the Russian President. We can point to them and say, I'm not like him which then leads to I'm not so bad which leads eventually to I don't need God's offer of a Saviour. (which of course means Jesus died on the cross for others but not for me.)

In just a few sentences we have rationalized that these verses from Scripture don't apply to us. We have placed ourselves outside God's solution to this human condition. You can't make Nero or President Putin the standard for your righteousness. Paul never mentions the emperor as a way to soften the blow of these words. It has to be God's standard which is perfection and that clearly shows that none of us make it.

Here's how Eugene Peterson puts these verses in **The Message**: 'It wasn't so long ago that you were mired in that old stagnant life of sin. You let the world, which doesn't know the first thing about living, tell you how to live. You filled your lungs with polluted unbelief, and then exhaled disobedience. We all did it, all of us doing what we felt like doing, when we felt like doing it, all of us in the same boat. It's a wonder God didn't lose his temper and do away with the whole lot of us.'

**v.4-10 Our Spiritual Life** and now thank God there is a different story to tell. It starts with two miraculous words, two of the greatest words in all of Scripture v.4 **But God** -here is the gospel message in all its glory. God couldn't leave us that way. He had to act. It occurs 45 times in the Bible. A great study in itself to check these out. Think Noah and Jonah.

James Montgomery Boice (Minister and writer in Philadelphia) "If you understand these two words, they will save your soul!"

At the end of v.3 we were in despair. There was nothing we could do.. But God,

v.5 'He gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead'

v.6 'he raised us from the dead along with Christ'

v6b 'and seated us with him'

In all of these actions we are linked to Christ. John Stott points out that these verbs (gave us life, raised, seated) refer to the three successive historical events in the saving work of Christ. We declare our belief in them when we say the creed.

'The third day he rose again from the dead, he ascended into heaven and he sits at the right hand of God the Father.'

The amazing thing is that Paul is not writing about Christ, but about us. We have been made alive, raised and seated with Christ.

What can we make of this? We couldn't do any of this ourselves, but God. It's talking about a living experience in our lives. 'Because we are united with Christ.' Like the vine and branches. We are in Christ. We were dead, but have been made alive. We were in captivity, but have been set free and seated with Christ. We live with Christ as part of his kingdom. You get it now why Paul is pouring out his heart in praise even in prison.

Let's look now about **why God acted in this way**.

Paul uses 4 words to give us a glimpse of the heart of God.

1. He writes of God's **mercy** v.4 'But God is so rich in mercy.'
2. Of God's **love** v.4 'he loved us so much.'
3. God's **grace** v.5 and v.8 'It is only by God's grace you have been saved.'
4. God's **kindness** v.7 'his kindness toward us.'

We could take some weeks on these terms alone. The hymn writers have done a good job in helping us understand these terms. In Charles Wesley's 'And can it be.'

v.3 He left his Father's throne above  
So free, so infinite His **grace**  
Emptied himself of all but love  
And bled for Adam's helpless race  
'Tis **mercy** all, immense and free  
For O my God it found out me.  
Mercy, love, grace and kindness.

How often do we hear these words in church. We use them every week in our praise, but there can be a danger in this.

In your mercy Lord hear our prayer-yeah yeah.

For God so loved...yes I know that too. John 3:16

It is only by grace-yes it's amazing. Heard it all before!

What's for dinner?

Don't let familiarity numb your senses to the truths of these words. Us oldies who have heard them more times than the rest need to beware. We don't have to fall for the adage, 'As you get older you get colder-referring to our spiritual life.' Our last years can be our best years. You could become a woman of prayer. A man of the book. As Stuart Briscoe says, 'Don't put your head down on the pillow at night unless you have had it in the book!'

**v.8-9 'God saved you by his grace when you believed and you can't take credit for this, it is a gift from God' Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it.'**

J.B. Phillips translation, '**It is by grace and not by achievement you were saved.'**

We live in an achievement based society. You need qualifications to do almost anything now. This kind of thinking fits into the religions of the world. You do this and climb that, pay this amount and visit this shrine. Christianity is revolutionary in that it says you can't make it this way. I can't earn God's forgiveness. No God has done something in Christ on the cross and by raising him from the dead, he can offer me forgiveness as a gift.

I reach out for that gift in faith. It's not blind faith. It is evidence based. Remember the apostle John who was an eye witness for 3 years to the ministry of Jesus said near the end of his gospel, '**These things are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and that by believing you may have life in his name.'** John20v31

The whole of the New Testament is documentary evidence.

Why you maybe have someone in your own family who is providing evidence by the change in their life since they trusted Christ.

So that's that then. If we have trusted Christ, are born again, saved, we've got our ticket for the bus to heaven. Nothing else to do but sit back and wait. This is as bad an idea as thinking you can get to heaven under your own steam.

Paul deals with this in this commonly overlooked verse.

**v.10 'We are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.'**

We are God's masterpiece, his work of art, his poem.

What me a masterpiece? The truth is we are a work in progress and God isn't finished with us yet. When we step onto the narrow way his work of changing us now lies ahead.

Now you put a painting or other work of art on a wall or on a plinth to simply stay there. Not so us. We were designed for action. For good deeds, for works.

Wait a minute you say. You've been pointing out that good works won't work in gaining our salvation and now we are to do good works! Sounds Irish. You see Paul has put his case so that works or good deeds are now in the right place. These good deeds come after salvation and they are ones that God has planned for us to do. This fits right in with what James teaches about good deeds in his book. People like to throw Paul and James into the ring together, but they compliment one another.

We are not saved merely for our own benefit, but to serve Christ and build up the church. (see last 3 chapters of Ephesians)

What can we take into this week?

1. As you get older you get colder. (Don't mean you need a hot water bottle in bed!) What could we set in place this week to make sure this doesn't happen to us?
2. Have you a spiritual before and after story? What part of this passage are you living in. Spiritual death or spiritual life? Today is a good day to choose life. To reach out in faith and accept God's free gift.

May God help us to do just that.