

Ephesians 2:1-10

You were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked when you followed the ways of this present world. You were following the ruler of the domain of the air, the spirit now at work in the people who disobey. Formerly, we all lived among them in the passions of our sinful flesh, as we carried out the desires of the sinful flesh and its thoughts. Like all the others, we were by nature objects of God's wrath. But God, because he is rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in trespasses. It is by grace you have been saved! He also raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. He did this so that, in the coming ages, he might demonstrate the surpassing riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. Indeed, it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared in advance so that we would walk in them.

Dear friends in Christ Jesus:

“You used to be so cute, what happened?” Has anyone ever said that when looking at your baby pictures? It's a joke that never seems to grow old because there's probably some truth to it. With their big eyes, chubby cheeks, and tiny little fists babies are cuter than most.

Is this what God thought when he looked at you as a baby? In a way yes, because he created you and would have been proud of his handiwork. But, as we continue our sermon series on Ephesians, we'll see that God was also revolted by what we he saw. God saw a major mess, spiritually speaking. Thankfully God also did something about that. He has transformed us into a masterpiece. We went from major mess to masterpieces. Let's find out how and why God did that as we get **A God's-eye View of Our Past and Present**.

The Apostle Paul dives right into matters when he begins our text by saying, **“You were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked when you followed the ways of this present world. You were following the ruler of the domain of the air, the spirit now at work in the people who disobey. Formerly, we all lived among them in the passions of our sinful flesh, as we carried out the desires of the sinful flesh and its thoughts. Like all the others, we were by nature objects of God's wrath”** (Ephesians 2:1-3). Shows about zombies used to be all the rage. It's easy to laugh at the portrayal of these make-believe creatures, but God isn't laughing when he looks at this world because he sees spiritual zombies everywhere. God sees people who are very much alive with physical life and so they run around at recess, they drink coffee, and they cook dinners for the family. But God also sees that from the moment they are conceived, these people are dead spiritually, only wanting to follow Satan instead of him. They do so by gratifying their sinful cravings. And what's more, says Paul, we were once one of them.

We often look at our lives and think that we're pretty good, at least compared to many others. But if you are to compare our actions to God's standards, it's not hard to see how we are not as good as we think. For example, God wants us to speak kind and encouraging words to one another, but what comes more naturally are the putdowns. God wants us to put the best construction on what others say and do, but we find it easier to jump to negative conclusions. We were and continue to show ourselves to be a major mess. Like roadkill we ought to have been scraped into God's rubbish bin a long time ago.

But listen to what God did instead. Paul writes: **“But God, because he is rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in trespasses. It is by grace you have been saved! He also raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. He did this so that, in the coming ages, he might demonstrate the surpassing riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus”** (Ephesians 2:4-7).

You would think that God would require us to do our best to clean off the sins that pollute us from the bottom of our hearts. But remember the God's-eye view of reality Paul just gave us a moment ago. He said we were *dead* in our sins, not just hurt or wounded by them.

So if we are going to be saved, it's going to take a miracle just as powerful and as stunning as when Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. And that's exactly what God did when he brought you to faith in Jesus. He raised you to life. But not only did he raise you, explains Paul, he also seated you with Christ in the heavenly places

(Ephesians 2:6). Notice how Paul does not say that this is something that God will do for all believers in the *future*. No. Those who have faith in Jesus as their Savior are seated with him *right now* in the heavenly places.

But how can that be if we're still on earth? Perhaps we could think of it like this. What difference would it make to you if, on a 10-hour flight to Paris, you flew first class instead of economy? You would be better fed, you would have more comfortable seating, and therefore you would arrive at your destination refreshed and relaxed, instead of frazzled and a bit grumpy. Imagine your excitement if a couple hours before boarding, you find out that you are being bumped up to first class from economy. You're now looking forward to the flight a lot more than you were a few hours before. And as you wait to board, you can be sure that the gate agents will pay special attention to any requests you might have as a first-class passenger.

Likewise, even though we are not physically in heaven yet, through faith in Jesus we have been seated with him in the heavenly places. We've been upgraded to first class and even though we're not enjoying the glories of heaven yet, we do have much to look forward to. That truth should change your outlook on our present challenges and frustrations. They won't last forever. And anyway, just as the gate agent is going to be more apt to help a first-class passenger get settled in, so as a child of God you have your Savior's attention as you journey to heaven. He will help you through your struggles now.

But those who fly first class are often notorious for their spoiled-brat behavior. That is not how we Christians are to be. Since we have been raised with Christ and are seated with him, we will now want to live for him. Paul put that thought like this in his letter to the Colossians which he wrote at the same time as his letter to the Ephesians. Paul said: **"Therefore, because you were raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God"** (Colossians 3:1-3).

What happened to you spiritually at your conversion is what happened to many believers physically at Jesus' death. When Jesus died there was a great earthquake and many dead believers came back to life. After Jesus' resurrection three days later these recently raised believers went back into Jerusalem to resume their lives on earth. But what do you suppose those people were doing between the time they were raised to life and the time they went back into Jerusalem? Were they hitting the bars and getting tipsy as they celebrated their resurrection? Were they plotting the best way to make life miserable for their siblings again, and planning on resuming old rivalries and feuds? Of course not! How could they spend one second entertaining such sinful thoughts when they had just been to heaven and back? No, they would have been eager to tell everyone about their experience and to glorify their Lord and Savior with their words and actions. We haven't been to heaven and back, but we have been raised to life with Jesus. Our goal now is to live for him, and we have help in the matter. Paul wrote in our text: **"We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared in advance so that we would walk in them"** (Ephesians 2:10).

The Greek word translated as "workmanship" is *poema*, from which we get the English word poem. In other words, you are God's poem, his masterpiece. From major mess to masterpiece that's what God has made you to be. And no, we're not all going to serve God in the same way. Some of you are gifted at encouraging. Others are gifted at getting things done. Others are visionaries. In that sense we're like different verses of a hymn. The words are all slightly different, but we're set to the same melody—the melody of God's grace to praise Christ.

You were once an object of God's wrath because you were dead in your sins. But you are now alive in Christ, eager to serve the Lord. Yet Satan can get you to feel discouraged because you haven't lived up to God's standards. I'm a failure in that regard too. But God's undeserved love has poured onto us in the person of Jesus. Paul reminds us: **"Indeed, it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast"** (Ephesians 2:8-9). It is by grace we are saved, not by our works. It is through faith in Jesus, not faith in our promise to do better, that heaven is ours. So when you are feeling the burden of your sins, don't try to fix the problem on your own, run to God's Word. Run to receive Holy Communion for it assures you of God's promise to keep transforming you from major mess to masterpiece.

I started this sermon by talking about what others often say when looking at our baby pictures: "I can't believe you used to be so cute!" You can answer like this: "Really? That's when I was ugly. But then God took hold of me in baptism and has turned me into his masterpiece. He's done this for Jesus' sake so that I might enjoy an awesome eternity. May I tell you how he's done this for you too?" Amen.