



Dead, Alive, Seated

Kicking It Off

What's the most lost you've ever been, physically, and how did you find your way back?

Read

Ephesians 2:1-10

Summary

Most people miss this about their spiritual condition. It's not that they took a wrong turn and need better directions. It's that they were completely dead, with nothing left to work with.

Paul in Ephesians 2 makes this uncomfortably clear. He doesn't say humanity is struggling or lost or a little off course. He says we were dead. Dead in our sins, walking through life under the influence of the world's value system, the enemy's active manipulation, and our own desires. And here's the kicker: by nature, we were all in that condition. Nobody gets to opt out of this diagnosis.

The reason this matters is that we spend a lot of energy trying to solve a dead-person problem with alive-person solutions. We chase enough money to feel secure, find relationships that give us meaning, build communities that make life feel worthwhile. None of that is bad. But none of it actually fixes what's broken. You can't row your way to shore when you're stranded in the middle of the ocean. At some point, you have to admit that rescue has to come from outside.

And that's where the best two words in the Bible show up. "But God." Rich in mercy, with a love that didn't wait for us to become lovable first. He reached into the grave and made dead people alive. Raised them. Seated them right alongside Christ in the heavenly places. That's not future. That's already done.

So what do we do with that? We walk. But here's the surprising part: the walking starts with sitting. You've been seated with Christ. The good works God has for you are already prepared and waiting. Your job isn't to invent them or power through them on your own. Your job is to slow down, follow the Spirit, and step into what God already has

ready for you. You didn't save yourself, and you don't power your own walk with God. He did it all, and He'll lead you in it. Your part is to follow.

Discussion Questions

1. Was there anything from the sermon or the passage that stuck out to you?
2. Paul describes humanity as "dead" in trespasses rather than simply lost or struggling. What changes when you take the word "dead" seriously, and how does it affect the way you understand what God did for you?
3. The enemy's strategy isn't to make people obviously miserable but to keep them satisfied with good things like money, relationships, and community, so they never look past them. Where have you found yourself most tempted to treat a good thing as an ultimate thing?
4. Ephesians 2:6 says believers are already seated with Christ in the heavenly places, not that they will be someday. What would change in your daily life if you actually lived from that settled identity rather than toward it?
5. Paul says we are God's workmanship, created for good works that He prepared beforehand. What does it look like practically to walk into works God has already prepared, rather than inventing your own agenda for serving?
6. Paul wrote Ephesians from a prison cell, with his freedom stripped away, and the letter is full of praise. What does his contentment reveal about where he had placed his identity, and where does your contentment tend to be located?

Significant Quotes from Sermon

"He is not saying you are lost. He is saying something far deeper. You were dead. It wasn't lost and you were found. You are completely dead in your trespasses, and there was no hope. It wasn't as if you could meander your way and find your way back home somehow."

"The devil is so happy to hear you say that you are content with how much you have, that you are content with these individual relationships, that you are content with your community. None of these things are bad. But none of these things are ultimate things."

"You can take away my money. You could take away my family. You could take away my country. You could take away my church. And you know what? I would still be praising His name. Because my life's not about the riches. It's not about the community. It's not even about my family. That you loved me even in my trespasses and you picked me up out of my grave."

"How do I learn how to walk further in the Lord? By learning how to sit down. Sit down so that Christ can stand in your life. You are called to do good works. But please do not make the good works about your power. You have been saved by the power of God to do works by the power of God. Your power is not a part of the equation."

Sermon Notes

Ephesians 2:1-10

2 And you were dead in the trespasses and sins 2 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— 3 among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the flesh and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. 4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— 6 and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast. 10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

Outline

1. Dead (Ephesians 2:1-3)

- a. Central point: Apart from Christ, every person is spiritually dead, walking under the rule of the world, the flesh, and the devil, and standing under God's wrath by nature.
- b. "Dead in trespasses and sins" is a verdict, not a metaphor for weakness (v. 1).
- c. Three powers driving the spiritually dead: the course of this world, the prince of the power of the air, the passions of the flesh (v. 2).
- d. "By nature children of wrath" is universal — Paul includes himself in "we all" (v. 3).
- e. The enemy's goal is not chaos but comfort: distract people with good things so they never look past them.
- f. You cannot dig yourself out of this hole. Nothing external can solve an internal death.

2. Alive (Ephesians 2:4-7)

- a. Central point: God interrupts the grave with mercy, and the dead are made alive, raised, and seated together with Christ.
- b. "But God" — the hinge of the whole passage (v. 4). The cause is in Him: rich in mercy, great love.
- c. Three verbs joined to Christ: made alive with, raised with, seated with in the heavenly places (vv. 5-6).
- d. The "seated" verb is present reality, not future promise. Identity is fixed before it is felt.
- e. God sends His rain into the grave; the flooded pit lifts us to His hand.
- f. Purpose: the coming ages will display the immeasurable riches of His grace toward us (v. 7).
- g. The church is not the savior; Christ is. The church is the community that loves the savior.

3. Seated to Walk (Ephesians 2:8-10)

- a. Central point: Because we are saved by grace through faith and seated with Christ, we are God's workmanship, made to walk in the good works He prepared for us.
- b. Grace is the source, faith is the instrument, and even the faith is the gift of God (vv. 8-9). No boasting.
- c. We are His workmanship (poiema), not our own achievement. Good works flow from finished identity.
- d. The good works are prepared in advance and waiting — our job is to walk in them, not invent them (v. 10).

- e. The paradox: to walk further in the Lord, learn how to sit down. Be seated so Christ can stand in your life.
- f. Practical application: wait on the Holy Spirit, sense where He is leading, do that specific thing.
- g. Reading the Bible without doing what it says is useless. The coach said go left — go left.
- h. Paul wrote from prison and still praised. Strip away everything, and the identity remains.

Notes

There is a difference between being lost and being dead. Most people are willing to admit they are lost. Lost implies direction, movement, the possibility of correction. Lost says you took a wrong turn, but the road still exists and you are still walking. Dead says something else entirely. Dead says the walking is over. Dead says there is no wrong turn to correct because there is no more movement at all.

Paul does not say humanity is lost. He says it is dead. "You were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked" (Ephesians 2:1). This is not a metaphor for struggle or weakness. This is a verdict. A dead person cannot rouse themselves, cannot correct their course, cannot supply what they lack. The problem is not that humanity needs better directions. The problem is that humanity needs a resurrection.

The diagnosis runs deeper than individual bad choices. Paul identifies three forces that define the life of the spiritually dead. There is the course of this world, the age-shaped system of values and assumptions that operates apart from God. There is the prince of the power of the air, the one Paul calls the spirit at work in the sons of disobedience, actively energizing the direction of the dead. And there are the passions of the flesh, the desires of body and mind that pull from within. These three work together. The world sets the agenda, the enemy reinforces it, and the flesh is already inclined toward it. The captivity is total.

Paul then adds a phrase that closes every escape route: "by nature children of wrath" (v. 3). This is not wrath earned by particular sins, though sins are real. This is what we are before we do anything. The problem is not the sum of our choices, it is the condition from which our choices arise. Every person, Paul says, stands under God's just judgment by nature, not only by performance. He includes himself: "among whom we all once lived." The problem is universal and structural.

This is where the enemy is most active, and most subtle. The strategy is not to make people obviously miserable. It is to make them comfortable enough that they stop asking the important question. When a person has sufficient income, a partner who makes them feel worthwhile, and a community that affirms them, the question of whether there is something more, something deeper, something eternal, rarely surfaces. The material fills the space. The relational fills the space. The communal fills the space. And none of it touches the actual problem, because the actual problem is not material. None of these things, good as they are, can bring salvation, identity, or the meaning a person was made for. They are good things, but they are not ultimate things. The enemy's work is to make the good things function as ultimate things, so that the person never looks past them.

The logic is not hard to follow, once you sit with it. A person stranded in the middle of the ocean, with no land visible on any side, cannot row to shore. There is no shore to aim for. Resources help delay, but they do not rescue. A partner makes the situation less lonely, but two people adrift are still adrift. A community of fellow sufferers creates warmth, but warmth is not rescue. Nothing any of them do changes the fact that they are in the middle of the ocean with no horizon.

That is the point. Not to be cruel, but to be accurate. The Christian gospel does not begin with good advice for people who are doing reasonably well. It begins with a diagnosis that the patients themselves cannot administer and cannot cure. Apart from Christ, every person is spiritually dead, walking under the rule of the world, the flesh, and the devil, and standing under God's wrath by nature.

Then Paul writes two of the most important words in all of Scripture: "But God" (v. 4).

The sentence Paul began in verse one, describing the condition of the dead, does not reach its main verb until verse five. He has spent four verses in the grave, and now the sentence turns. But God. The adversative is the hinge. Everything before it is what we were. Everything after it is what He did. The cause does not come from us. It comes from Him: "rich in mercy," "great love," and a love that did not wait for us to become lovable before He loved.

Three verbs then arrive together, and each one is joined to Christ. God made us alive with Him. God raised us with Him. God seated us with Him in the heavenly places (vv. 5-6). These are not three future promises. They are three accomplished facts, stated in the past tense. The Christian's identity is not approaching, it is already fixed. The resurrection of Jesus is not only a historical event, it is a present reality that has been applied to His people. What happened to Him has happened to them.

The verb "seated" is the one that needs to sit for a moment. Paul does not say that believers will eventually be seated, or that they are on the way to being seated. He says they are seated, right now, in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. This is a scandalous claim for anyone who looks at their actual life and sees very little evidence of heavenly exaltation. The point is that the Christian's position before God is not determined by how the day went. It is determined by what Christ accomplished. The position is real before it is felt, and it is felt most when it is believed.

The purpose clause in verse seven opens the horizon further. God raised and seated these dead people "so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus." The salvation of sinners is not only rescue. It is demonstration. The church is God's exhibit of what grace looks like, an

ongoing display of His character that will continue through eternity. This is not a small project. This is the story God is telling with His people.

Verses eight through ten compress the whole transaction into a few lines. Grace is the source. Faith is the instrument. And even the faith, Paul insists, is "the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast." The door is shut on every form of self-congratulation. There is no version of this story in which the person being raised from the dead deserves credit for the resurrection. The one thing we brought to the transaction is the death.

But Paul will not let grace become an excuse for passivity. The same verse that denies works as a basis for salvation immediately affirms works as the destination of salvation. "We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them" (v. 10). The word for "workmanship" is *poiema*, the word from which we get "poem." We are something God made. We are the product of His craftsmanship, not our own achievement. And the works we are made to do are not invented by us in the moment, they are appointed in advance, waiting.

This is the paradox that runs through the end of the passage. The believer is called to walk in good works, but the walking depends on something that looks like the opposite of walking. In verse two, the spiritually dead walked in trespasses. In verse ten, the redeemed are created to walk in good works. Same verb, different path, and the difference is not a change in effort but a change in who is in charge.

To walk in the good works God prepared means, practically, to stop inventing your own agenda and start paying attention to where the Spirit is leading. It means serving in ways that feel uncomfortable, not only in ways that showcase existing strengths. It means slowing down enough to ask, honestly, what God is asking, and then doing that specific thing rather than the impressive substitute. The one who has been seated with Christ does not need to climb. He needs to follow.

Paul wrote these words from a prison cell. His rights were stripped, his movement constrained, his comfort eliminated. And the letter is full of praise. The jailers watched a man who had every reason to be miserable sit in a cell and sing. The explanation Paul gives is not positive thinking. It is theological. He knew what he had before he knew what he lacked, and what he had could not be confiscated. He was dead, and God raised him. He was seated before he was imprisoned. No cell changes that.

The same is true for anyone who belongs to Christ. You can lose the money, the family, the community, the country, the church. None of those losses changes the verdict of verses four through six. Dead, made alive. Raised. Seated. The identity is fixed before it is felt, and the life that flows from it is not a life of performance but of gratitude and followership, stepping into works that God already has waiting.

Blog

Paul writes Ephesians from prison. He has just spent the first chapter pouring out the Trinitarian blessings the church has been given in Christ, then praying that the eyes of their hearts would be opened to see those blessings. Now in chapter 2 he turns from doxology to diagnosis. Before he can talk about who we are in Christ, he has to tell us what we were without Him. The first ten verses of Ephesians 2 speaks of our death, announce God's mercy, and describe what He has made of us. The whole passage moves through three words: dead, alive, seated.

Paul opens with an outcome. "And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked." He does not say sick. He does not say weak. He does not say struggling. He says dead. The Greek word is the same one used for a corpse. If you stand in a funeral home, what you see is not someone who needs encouragement. It is someone who needs life from outside themselves. That is Paul's claim about every person apart from Christ. The condition is not a steep hill, it is a closed grave.

He then describes how that death moved through the world. Dead people walk, but they walk on borrowed time. Their walking follows three masters: the course of this world, the prince of the power of the air (Paul's name for Satan), and the passions of the flesh. The world shapes our imagination. The evil one energizes our rebellion. Our own desires drive us toward the things that destroy us. The captivity is total. There is no clean compartment of the human person that remains untouched.

Then in verse 3, Paul does something easy to miss. He stops saying "you" and starts saying "we." "Among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh." Paul, a faithful Jew with impeccable religious credentials, places himself in the same grave with the Gentile readers in Ephesus. He goes further. "We were by nature children of wrath." That phrase has done heavy work in church history. By nature, not by accident, not by environment, not only by deliberate choice. The Greek word translated "by nature" (*physei*) tells us where the wrath belongs. It belongs to what we are, not just what we have done. This is one of the cornerstone texts for what theologians call original sin, the conviction that we are not basically good people who occasionally make bad choices. We are people whose nature has been broken at the root, and the broken nature produces broken choices. We live in a culture that has spent generations telling us our problem is mostly external. Bad teachers, bad parents, bad systems, bad luck. Paul does not deny that those things matter. But he insists that something deeper is wrong with us than what has been done to us. We are not merely victims of the world. We are participants in its rebellion. Until the gospel diagnoses that, the gospel cannot heal it.

Then comes the most important "but" in the New Testament. "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." Two words turn the entire passage. But God. Up to this point, Paul has been describing what we were. From this point on, he is describing what God did. The pivot is not in us. We did not stir, repent, ask, or qualify. The corpse did not lift its head. God acted. He acted out of mercy that belongs to His nature ("rich in mercy") and love that has no cause outside itself ("the great love with which He loved us"). When God moves toward sinners, He moves from who He is, not from what we offer.

Three verbs, all bound to Christ. He made us alive together with Christ. He raised us up together with Christ. He seated us together with Christ in the heavenly places. The Greek attaches a little prefix (syn, meaning "with") to each of these verbs, and the cumulative effect is overwhelming. What happened to Jesus has happened to His people. He died, and we died with Him. He rose, and we rose with Him. He sat down at the right hand of the Father, and we sat down with Him. Paul is not predicting these things for the end of time. He uses verbs in the past tense. They are accomplished. The Christian's identity is already fixed in Christ above, before it is felt at the kitchen table below.

The word "seated" deserves attention. In our experience, Christian life often feels like climbing. We struggle, we slip, we keep trying. Paul says no. The truest thing about us is not that we are climbing toward a seat in heaven. The truest thing is that we are already seated, because Christ is seated, and we are united to Him. This is not denial of our struggle. It is the floor underneath our struggle. The believer's position in Christ is not a finish line, it is the starting point for every day of the rest of life.

Paul cannot let the chapter pass without naming the engine of all this. "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." Grace is the source. Faith is the way grace reaches us. Neither one is a contribution we bring to the table. The faith that receives the gift is itself a gift. Boasting is shut down at the root. There is no platform left for "well, at least I had the good sense to believe." Even the believing is grace.

Then the closing turn. We are God's "workmanship," Paul says, "created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." The Greek word for workmanship (poiema) is the root of our English word "poem." We are something God has crafted, not something we have produced. And we have been crafted with a purpose. Good works do not save us, but we have been saved for them. They are not improvised by us in the moment. They are appointed by God in advance and waiting for us to step into them.

Paul ends where he began. In verse 2, the dead walked in trespasses. In verse 10, the alive walk in the works God prepared. Same body, redirected path. The Christian life

is not a higher version of the old life. It is a different walk altogether, and the path was laid out before we got there.

The whole passage refuses dilution from both ends. We are tempted to soften "dead" into "struggling," because struggling feels manageable. We are tempted to soften "seated" into "hopeful," because seated sounds like a future we have not earned yet. Paul will not let us do either. Both are true at the same time. We were corpses. We are seated with Christ. Most of us live somewhere between the two, soft on both ends, half believing the diagnosis and half believing the cure.

This Sunday's text is for the believer who has stopped feeling the weight of either side. It is for the one who needs to remember the grave they were lifted from, and the throne they are seated at. The point is not to feel worse about your past or to feel better about your effort. It is to see the gospel again, all the way down. Dead people raised. Raised people seated. Seated people sent to walk in the works God already has waiting. This is the gospel Paul wrote from prison, to a church surrounded by the gods of its age, in a world that had no shortage of religious options. It is the same gospel today. Not a project of self improvement. Not a moral upgrade. A resurrection. A "but God." A walk that begins from a finished identity, not a striving one. You were dead, and Christ found you. You are seated, and Christ holds you there. Whatever you walk into this week, you walk from there.